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DOROTHY GILMAN

AROUND THE WORLD WITH MRS. POLLIFAX

THE AMAZING MRS. POLLIFAX

MRS. POLLIFAX ON SAFARI

MRS. POLLIFAX AND THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

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THE AMAZING MRS. POLLIFAX
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(continued on back flap)

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MRS. POLLIFAX AND THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

by

Dorothy Gilman

Mystery Guild
Garden City, New York

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THE AMAZING MRS. POLLIFAX

For Christopher and Jonathan Butters

CHAPTER 1

MRS. POLLIFAX HAD ATTENDED CHURCH THAT SUNDAY MORNING, and her hat—a garden of pale pink roses and green leaves—still sat on her head as she ate lunch in the sunny kitchen of her apartment. She had a tendency to be absent-minded lately about hats—in fact since beginning karate lessons she had become forgetful about a number of things—and since she would be going out again soon she had anticipated the problem by placing her hat where it could not possibly be left behind. This freed her mind for more important matters, such as a review of pressure points, or how to unbalance an assailant with an elbow-upward strike.

But Mrs. Pollifax was conscientious by nature, and if her karate textbook lay to the right of the sugar bowl, the Sunday edition of the *Times* lay on its left. She sighed faintly over her choice but it was the *Times* to which she turned first, carefully unfolding its front page for a quick scanning of the headlines. ENEMY AGENT DEFECTS IN ISTANBUL, THEN VANISHES, she read. *Woman Had Sought Sanctuary in British Consulate, Mysteriously Disappears.*

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Pollifax delightedly, and promptly forgot both lunch and karate.

Some months earlier a small episode of espionage had inserted itself like an exclamation point in Mrs. Pollifax's long, serene and unpunctuated life. Once it had ended—and she had enjoyed every moment of it—she had resumed her quiet existence with a sense of enrichment, of having added a dimension to her thoughts that could only be described as a chuckle. That chuckle was present now as she plunged into the news story, for not only was the defecting agent a woman but her past was so lengthy that Mrs. Pollifax guessed that fewer than six years separated them in age.

How very astonishing, she thought, reacting with the fascination of an amateur confronted by her professional counterpart. The news account promised a biography of the woman—Mrs. Pollifax's glance longingly caressed it—but with an exercise of will she saved it for the last.

The woman had leaped into the news by suddenly and mysteriously arriving at the British Consulate in Istanbul, breathless and ragged, to beg for help. After identifying herself as Magda Ferenci-Sabo she had been put to bed at once—at ten o'clock on a summer evening—with a sedative and a cup of tea. In the morning she had vanished, and this was all that the consul—tight-lipped and shaken—allowed himself to say, but rumors swept Istanbul that she had been abducted.

This in itself was front page news, and Mrs. Pollifax eagerly turned to the details of Magda Ferenci-Sabo's life. There were a surprising number, for an enterprising journalist had pieced together a great many old news items, adding suppositions and conclusions that alternately shocked and educated Mrs. Pollifax, who had been a spy quite by accident and for only a few brief weeks. "As an international beauty of the thirties, Ferenci-Sabo appeared at all the right places with the wrong people," commented the author of the article, and there was a blurred picture of her—all teeth and long hair—laughing on a beach with Mussolini. Then there were the marriages: first a French playboy mysteriously killed a year after the honeymoon (the journalist managed to suggest that he had been murdered by his bride); a wealthy German who later became a high official in the Nazi party; and at length a Hungarian Communist writer name Ferenci-Sabo, who was murdered in 1956 by freedom fighters. Following this the woman had disappeared—into Russia, it was believed, where it was rumored that she was actively involved in the INU.

"What an extraordinary woman," mused Mrs. Pollifax; and obviously a ruthless one as well. She wondered what such a woman thought about when the lovers and husbands had departed, leaving her alone with her thoughts, and she wondered what her motives might be in defecting now. It seemed a curious moment for such a leap. What could possibly have filled her with revulsion *now*?

Reluctantly Mrs. Pollifax put aside both speculations and newspaper because it was—she glanced at the clock on the wall—almost two o'clock of a Sunday afternoon, and before leaving for the Garden Club film (*Gardens of the Mediterranean*) she wanted to compose a grocery list for the week. She reached for pencil and notebook and had just begun to concentrate when the telephone rang. List in hand she walked into the livingroom and before picking up the receiver added EGGS,

ORANGE JUICE. "Hello," she said absently, and suddenly remembered that she had promised cookies for the Art Association tea next Sunday.

"Mrs. Pollifax?" said a bright young voice. "Mrs. Emily Pollifax?"

"Speaking," said Mrs. Pollifax, and carefully wrote *sugar, vanilla, walnuts*.

"One moment please . . ."

A man's voice said, "Good afternoon, Mrs. Pollifax, I'm certainly glad to have found you at home."

The point of Mrs. Pollifax's pencil snapped as she caught her breath sharply. This was a voice that she recognized at once, and a voice she had not expected to hear again. "Why, Mr. Carstairs!" she cried warmly. "How very nice to hear from you!"

"Thank you," he said graciously. "You've been well?"

"Yes—very, thank you."

"Good. I wonder if I might ask two questions of you then that will save us both invaluable time."

"Why not?" said Mrs. Pollifax reasonably. "Except I can't think of anything you don't already know about me."

Carstairs said pleasantly, "I don't know, for instance, if you would be immediately available—or even interested—in doing another job of work for me."

Mrs. Pollifax's heart began to beat very quickly. Split second decisions had never been her forte and she did not want to say yes without first remembering what Mr. Carstairs' work involved but on the other hand if a split second decision was necessary she did not want to say no, either. "Yes," she said recklessly, and promised herself the luxury of thinking about it later.

"Good," said Carstairs. "Question number two: are you free to leave immediately?"

"Immediately?" repeated Mrs. Pollifax, stung by the urgency of the words. "Immediately!" Of course he wasn't serious.

"I can give you thirty minutes."

"To decide whether I can leave immediately?"

"No, to leave."

Mrs. Pollifax was incredulous. Her glance fell to her grocery list, and then moved to the unwashed dishes on the counter in the kitchen; they at least were real. They would also, she remembered, take at least ten minutes to wash and put away. "But where?" she gasped. "For how long?"

Carstairs' voice was patient as if he realized the shock engendered by any such staggering rearrangements of a person's time concepts. "Put it this way," he suggested. "Have you any absolutely vital commitments

during the next few days, say between today Sunday—and Sunday a week?"

"Only my karate lessons," said Mrs. Pollifax. "And then of course I'm to pour at the Art Association tea next Sunday."

"An interesting combination," said Carstairs dryly. "You did say karate?"

"Yes indeed," admitted Mrs. Pollifax with a rush of enthusiasm. "I've been enjoying it enormously and I rather think that Lorvale retired police sergeant Lorvale Brown—is quite shaken by my success." She stopped, appalled. "What on earth would I *tell* people? How would I explain my—just dashing off?"

"Your daughter-in-law in Chicago will have to be ill," said Carstairs. "We can, for instance, monitor any long distance calls that your son might get from New Brunswick, New Jersey—but that's a problem we'll work out. Count on us."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pollifax, and took a deep breath. "Then I daresay I'd better hang up and get started. I'd better do something. *Something*," she added wanly.

"There will be a police car at your door in precisely twenty-two minutes. The call went through to them the moment you said yes "

"How *is* Bishop?" asked Mrs. Pollifax fondly.

"—and in the meantime pack a small bag for a few days of travel. You'll be getting briefed within the hour. And now Godspeed, I leave you with twenty minutes in which to get ready."

"Yes," gasped Mrs. Pollifax, and to her first mental list knit suit, pink dress added: cancel newspaper and milk deliveries, notify janitor, Lorvale, Miss Hartshorne . . .

"Goodbye, Mrs. Pollifax," said Carstairs, and abruptly rang off.

Mrs. Pollifax slowly put down the receiver and stared at it. "Well!" she exclaimed softly, reflecting upon how quickly life could change, and then in a surprised voice, *"Well!"* Her gaze fell on the clock and she jumped to her feet and began clearing away the lunch dishes: it gave her something to do. By the time that she had rinsed the dishes there was suddenly a great deal to do. She changed quickly into her navy blue knit suit, immediately placed the flowered hat on her head again, and packed walking shoes, cold cream and travel kit. She telephoned the dairy and then the newsman, and last of all Lorvale.

"I'm off on a little trip, Lorvale," she explained. "My daughter-in-law in Chicago needs me for a few days. I'm terribly sorry but I shall have to miss my Thursday lesson."

"I'm sorry, too," he said reproachfully. "You won't have a chance to practice your omo-tude, will you."

"No, Lorvale," she agreed solemnly.

Her note to Miss Hartshorne was the more difficult because Miss Hartshorne lived across the hall and had met Mrs. Pollifax's son and daughter-in-law at Christmas. The note had to be couched in dramatic enough terms to explain Mrs. Pollifax's precipitous departure thus canceling a lunch date with her—yet contain just enough information so that Miss Hartshorne would not unduly worry over Roger's wife and telephone Chicago to express her concern.

When the knock came upon her door Mrs. Pollifax was at the telephone again, having nearly forgotten the Art Association tea on Sunday. "Come in, it's unlocked," she called, and turned to nod at the young man who entered her livingroom—he was undoubtedly the plainclothes policeman sent by Mr. Carstairs. "It's my taxi," she blandly told the president of the Art Association. "Goodbye, dear."

"You're Mrs. Pollifax?" said the young man as she hung up.

"Yes, and you're—"

"Lieutenant Mullin. The car's outside. This your bag?"

"Oh thank you." Mrs. Pollifax picked up her purse, hesitated and turned to glance with finality at her dear, familiar apartment. For the first time she allowed herself to compare the world that she was leaving –safe, secure and predictable—with the world she was about to enter, and about the latter she could know nothing at all except that it was certain to prove insecure, difficult and totally unpredictable. "At my age," she murmured doubtfully, and then she recalled that at her age, less than a year ago, she had been held captive in an Albanian prison for a week, and before she led an escape party to the Adriatic those seven days had proven extremely informative and lively: she had met two Red Chinese generals, a Russian spy, and a rogue of an American agent. It was quite unlikely that she would have met them in New Brunswick, New Jersey. It was the quality of a life that mattered, not its quantity, she reflected; and recalling this she straightened her shoulders.

"We're in a hurry," Mullin reminded her.

"Yes," said Mrs. Pollifax, took a deep breath and followed him out into the hall, closing the door firmly behind her. She slipped her note to Miss Hartshorne under the door of apartment 4-C and with this act, at once so final and so irrevocable, all doubts fell from her and she experienced a sudden exhilaration. She had committed herself to another small adventure: something was going to happen.

The elevator door slid open at the first floor, Mullin hastened ahead to hold the outer glass door for her, and they walked into the sticky heat of a July afternoon. The unmarked police car was parked at the curb, next to the NO PARKING sign, with a second man at the wheel. Mrs. Pol-

lifax was no sooner seated with Mullin beside her, when the driver's foot hit the accelerator, a hidden siren began to scream, and Mrs. Pollifax, clinging to her flowered hat, was startled into delight. How marvelous to be involved in so much haste, she thought, and was not even dismayed when she found herself suddenly gazing into the eyes of her astonished pastor, who barely escaped the racing car by jumping back to the curb. "*C'est la vie*," she called out gaily, fluttering her hand at him, and then they were leaving the city behind, cars scattering to right and left at the sound of the siren. Moments later they entered the gates of the small local airport. The police car bounced across the field and came to a screaming halt in front of a helicopter whose blades were already beating the air. Mrs. Pollifax, clinging desperately to her hat now, was boosted into the copter, and almost before she had reworked her hatpins the helicopter was landing at a very busy and much larger airfield.

They appeared to be expected: a man in a wrinkled beige suit left a waiting car and raced toward them. "Mrs. Pollifax?" he shouted up at her.

"Yes," she screamed back, and was dropped from the cockpit into his arms.

"Over here," he said, grasping her elbow. "They're holding the plane. Jamison's my name."

"Yes, but where am I going?" she gasped.

"Later." He hurried her into the car, which immediately tore off with a squeal of tires.

"Then where am I now?" demanded Mrs. Pollifax.

"Kennedy International," he told her. "You did very well time-wise, but that plane over there is waiting just for us and they've already held up the flight five minutes."

"Flight for where?" asked Mrs. Pollifax again.

"Washington. Carstairs wants to brief you personally before you leave the country."

So she was to leave the country; Mrs. Pollifax felt that shiver of the irrevocable again, of forces in motion that could no longer be halted, and then the reaction passed as swiftly as it had arrived. The car stopped, the door was thrown open and Mrs. Pollifax was hurried up steps and into the plane, where she and Jamison were belted into their seats at once. Before Mrs. Pollifax had sufficiently caught her breath they were landing again.

"Dulles Airport," contributed Jamison with authority, and once they had reached the terminal he guided her through the building to the parking area. "Here we are," he said, pointing to a long black limousine, and

from it emerged Carstairs, tall, thin, his shock of crew-cut hair pure white against his tanned face.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Pollifax," he said gravely, as if they had met only yesterday and she had not been spirited to his side in less than an hour.

"I'm delighted to see you," said Mrs. Pollifax, clasping his hand warmly. "It's seemed such a long time. How have things been going?"

Carstairs said cheerfully, "Abominably, as always." He gestured toward a stolid-looking young man in a dark suit and black tie. "I'd like you to meet Henry Miles first."

"How do you do," said Mrs. Pollifax politely.

"Henry is going to be traveling behind you but not with you, and it's important you know what the other looks like."

"Behind me?" echoed Mrs. Pollifax as they shook hands.

"He's keeping an eye on you," explained Carstairs, and added with a faint smile, "This time I'm taking no chances with you. All right, Jamison, take Henry off to seat 22 and make sure that plane doesn't get away!" To Mrs. Pollifax he said, "You're about to depart for the Near East. Come and sit in my car, we've only fifteen minutes in which to talk."

CHAPTER 2

"THE NEAR EAST!" ECHOED MRS. POLLIFAX.

"Yes, on a ticklish courier assignment, and a risky one, the necessity of which became obvious only thirty minutes before I telephoned you." They were seated now in the rear of the limousine and he brought his attaché case to his lap. "I'm sending you to Istanbul," he said.

"Istanbul!" exclaimed Mrs. Pollifax, and in an astonished voice added, "Do you know, I was reading a news story from Istanbul only a few minutes before you telephoned!" She looked at him doubtfully. "Are you—that is, does this have anything to do with the Ferenci-Sabo woman, the Communist spy who tried to defect?"

"A great deal to do with it," Carstairs said. He unzipped the attaché case to expose an interior bulging with papers. Glancing up at her he said, "Except that rather a lot has happened since that news story you read."

"She's been found?" said Mrs. Pollifax eagerly.

"No." He shook his head. "If you take a second look at the dateline on your news story you'll discover the story was held up for twenty-four hours Ferenci-Sabo reached the consulate Friday night, God knows how, and was taken in. No, she's not been found. This is Sunday afternoon already late evening in Istanbul because of the time difference—and during these hours Istanbul has turned into a hotbed of intrigue, with agents pouring into the city from every point of the globe, all with one hope: either to find Ferenci-Sabo and offer her sanctuary in their country, or find Ferenci-Sabo and silence her, depending upon their political stance."

"She really was abducted then," said Mrs. Pollifax. "I thought—because of her importance—she might have been hidden away somewhere by the British."

"She was abducted all right," Carstairs said grimly. "Very cleverly, too, and it's believed she was abducted by Communists. The curious point is that she was abducted and not murdered. If it was silence her captors wanted, they need only have killed her in her bed at the consulate—the devils seemed to have had no problem entering the building! It leaves the implication that Ferenci-Sabo still has more value alive than dead—a conclusion," he added dryly, "that many other intelligence agencies have also reached. Ferenci-Sabo has now become fair game for everybody—and a great number of ruthless people have entered the game. A woman of Ferenci-Sabo's background was bound to be coveted but since she's been abducted, and is presumably still in Istanbul, there are high hopes that what one country has accomplished can be neatly done by another."

"I see," said Mrs. Pollifax, and waited patiently for the explanation that might make some sense of her being here. At the moment she could see no light at all.

As if reading her thoughts he said gravely, "I've called upon you, Mrs. Pollifax—with Miles to keep an eye on you—because in a city teeming with professionals you lack the slightest aura of corruption or professionalism yet at the same time"—his mouth curved wryly—"at the same time you give every evidence of being a resourceful courier."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Pollifax, "but a courier for what? I don't understand."

He said quietly, "We have heard from Ferenci-Sabo."

"You?" she said in astonishment. "The CIA? But how? When? Why?"

He held up his hand. "Please, we know almost nothing except that in a situation where we're technically only innocent bystanders we suddenly find ourselves in the position of being like the recipient of a ransom note in a kidnap case. No, that's misleading: she's apparently eluded her kidnappers and is alive and in hiding in Istanbul."

"How incredible," said Mrs. Pollifax.

He nodded. "The message, received late this morning, said only that Ferenci-Sabo would go each evening at eight o'clock to the lobby of the Hotel Itep—a small Turkish hotel in the old section—and look for someone carrying a copy of *Gone with the Wind*."

"Gone with the Wind!" echoed Mrs. Pollifax, suppressing a laugh.

"In Istanbul it's now almost Sunday midnight," went on Carstairs. "We had time to immediately notify our agent in Istanbul, who presented himself at eight o'clock at the Hotel Itep." Carstairs' mouth tightened. "Word of his death reached us thirty minutes before I telephoned you, Mrs. Pollifax. I *cannot* regard it as an accident."

Mrs. Pollifax expelled her breath slowly. "Oh," she said soberly. "Oh dear!"

"Yes. At eight-fifteen he walked out of the hotel with a woman companion—and a car suddenly went berserk in the street, pinning him to the wall and killing him instantly. The woman seen with him vanished into the crowd."

"I'm terribly sorry," Mrs. Pollifax said. "You think he met Ferenci-Sabo there?"

Carstairs shrugged. "It's quite possible, in which case she must be even more desperate after seeing her contact killed before her very eyes. You are in effect replacing a dead man, Mrs. Pollifax—but with one difference."

"Yes?"

"There may be a leak somewhere—or with so damn many agents in Istanbul they may be keeping one another under surveillance—but no one could possibly recognize you, or suspect you of being an agent. I intend that no one outside of this building know of your departure. In the world of espionage there are only two living people who have ever met you—John Sebastian Farrell, currently in South America, and General Perdido, now recovering from a heart attack in Peking. And this is the way I plan to keep it. Henry Miles knows nothing except that you are to be kept under surveillance—I'm sure that not even in his wildest dreams would he guess that a novice is being sent into such a maelstrom, even if he should know the situation—which he doesn't. In turn you are to send no cables nor contact me at all. You are to trust no one and above all," he concluded grimly, "you're to watch for reckless drivers when crossing streets in Istanbul. Now I think you will be happy to learn that this time you travel with a passport—a bona fide one accomplished for you in an hour's time."

"How nice," said Mrs. Pollifax, as he handed it to her. "Even my photograph!"

"Yes, we took one for our files, you may remember."

"Very efficient."

"Also money," he said, drawing a manila envelope from the attaché case and handing it to her. "Rather a lot of money because of the unpredictability of the—er—situation. And in this second envelope is money for Ferenci-Sabo, as well as a passport for her in another name. It lacks a photograph, of course, and this she will have to supply but it has all the necessary stampings proving that she entered Turkey legally a week ago, and as an American citizen. Here are your plane tickets," he added, "as well as an especially gaudy edition of *Gone with the Wind*. A reservation has been made for you at the Hotel Itep—there wasn't time to be

devious—and Henry Miles will have a room there too, but you are to avoid Henry, you understand? I don't want you linked with a professional under any circumstances we've already lost one. And on Saturday morning you are to fly back whether you have made contact or not."

"All the way to Asia and back in six days?" said Mrs. Pollifax. "My dear Mr. Carstairs I shall almost be back in time for the Art Association tea on Sunday."

"As a matter of fact by American time you will be," he said. "You will experience the uncanny sensation of arriving here long after the tea should have ended, only to discover that they're putting up the folding tables in New Brunswick. Ah here it is!" he exclaimed, and drew out another slip of paper. "I can't foresee what will be needed, Mrs. Pollifax. All this has happened too quickly to consider possibilities, but I'm giving you the name of a man in Istanbul who can be trusted in case of emergency. He's lived in Istanbul for a number of years, and you can rely on him to advise and help—but only if you have absolutely no other recourse. He's very highly placed so for God's sake be discreet if you go to him."

"An agent?" inquired Mrs. Pollifax cheerfully.

Carstairs looked pained. "My dear Mrs. Pollifax, I do wish you'd not leap to such dramatic conclusions. He's a noted criminologist, retired now, who writes and teaches. His name is Dr. Guillaume Belleaux. You will find the name of the university with which he is connected on this slip of paper, as well as his home address. There's no need to destroy or hide this address, Dr. Belleaux is highly respected by the Turkish government as well as ours, and any tourist might legitimately carry his name. Now." He smiled. "Got it all?"

Mrs. Pollifax was stuffing the envelopes into her fat purse. The book she placed under her arm. "I'm to register at the Hotel Itep," she said, "and to present myself in the lobby at eight each evening until hopefully—Ferenci-Sabo appears; I'm to give her passport and money, remember the name of Dr. Belleaux, and help Ferenci-Sabo in whatever way is needed."

"Right—and then vanish." Carstairs glanced quickly at his watch. "Now before we wrap this up are there questions?"

"Yes." She said slowly, "You say there may be a leak somewhere, Mr. Carstairs. You've also—somehow and very mysteriously set up a meeting with a woman who is a notorious Communist agent." She hesitated. "Yet nobody has seen her, and your Istanbul agent was killed trying to meet her." She looked at him. "Don't you suspect a trap? Do you really trust this woman?"

Carstairs smiled faintly. "Quite true, Mrs. Pollifax, and this is why I

insisted on briefing you personally." He removed a slip of yellow paper from the attaché case and handed it to her. "This is how we were advised about the rendezvous at the Hotel Itep."

Mrs. Pollifax took the proffered paper and read:

ISTANBUL: ARRIVED AT SIX STOP HAVE ENJOYED EIGHT HOURS ITEP OTELI STOP WISH YOU COULD JOIN ME STOP WHY NOT SEND RED QUEEN OR BLACK JACK BEFORE FRIDAY STOP LOVE ALICE DEXTER WHITE.

Mrs. Pollifax frowned. "Should I know what this means?"

Carstairs laughed. "On the contrary it took the coding department a number of trips to the archives to identify it and I don't believe they would have decoded it yet if the names of Red Queen and Black Jack hadn't been included. This was a code—a very simple one invented for rendezvous purposes—used by a small group of agents working in Occupied Paris during World War Two."

"World War Two," echoed Mrs. Pollifax, utterly lost. "But this has the flavor of a period piece!"

"Exactly. Code 6—this one, if you note the time of arrival—automatically stood for rendezvousing in a hotel lobby, with a copy of *Gone with the Wind* if identification was necessary. Code 5 stood for a metro station—I believe a Bible was used there—and seven, if I remember correctly, meant a church, and always the seventh pew on the left. And so on—there were eight in all. Red Queen was an agent named Agatha Simms, unfortunately killed several years ago in Hong Kong, and Black Jack was the code name of another agent in that group."

"And Alice Dexter White?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

Carstairs looked at her and then he looked down at the unlighted cigarette he held. "A very dear friend of mine which is how I come into this," he said quietly. "A very remarkable woman to whom I twice owe my life, and with whom I worked during those war years." He lifted his glance and regarded her with level eyes. "You are now about to join a very small and exclusive club, Mrs. Pollifax—only four living people know what I am about to tell you." He tapped the yellow cable with a finger. "This woman is one of our most valued agents but Alice Dexter White is only her code name. Her real name is Magda Ferenci-Sabo."

Mrs. Pollifax caught her breath sharply. "Good heavens," she gasped, "but this turns everything upside down!"

CHAPTER 3

DURING THE FIRST HOUR OF HER TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHT MRS. Pollifax had time to consider the events of the afternoon, but she was not at all certain that this was to her advantage. Her head still spun from her briefing with Carstairs, and it was difficult to find some graspable point of view with which to organize all that he had told her. "You remain, principally, a courier," he had said, "because I'm working on the assumption that once she has passport and money Ferenci-Sabo will know what to do. You may be called upon to help with a disguise, but she should be able to manage the rest herself. If by any chance it proves too hot for her to leave the country legally, this is when I recommend your approaching Dr. Belleaux."

"Why did she use such an ancient code?" Mrs. Pollifax had asked, understanding better now the choice of *Gone with the Wind*.

"Probably it's the only one she could recall from memory," he'd said. "Codes were simpler, more primitive, then. In those days she was Frau Wetzelmann," he added reminiscently.

"And you were Black Jack," guessed Mrs. Pollifax.

"Yes," he said quietly, and then, "Mrs. Pollifax, we don't know why Ferenci-Sabo came to Istanbul, or how, but this is one 'notorious Communist agent,' who must be allowed to defect. Must," he emphasized fiercely. "Not only for her sake — and what we owe her—but for ours as well, because if ever she were forced to talk —" He shuddered.

Mrs. Pollifax shivered a little too now, and opened up the copy of *House Beautiful* on her lap. Up and down the aisle passengers were studiously reading about the woman that Mrs. Pollifax was en route to meet. What was even more unnerving she now knew a great deal more about Ferenci-Sabo than the New York *Times*, and this in itself awed Mrs. Pollifax. But on the whole, as material for reflection, it was all too

overwhelming and after a while Mrs. Pollifax sensibly decided to stop thinking about it. Since by European time she would not arrive in Istanbul until late tomorrow afternoon she closed her eyes and presently slept.

Monday's dawn had arrived when they reached London, and as Mrs. Pollifax disembarked from the plane she set her watch ahead, noting that at home she would be listening to the eleven o'clock news before retiring for the night—how very odd traveling was! After purchasing a small travel guide to Turkey she made her way into the waiting room to await the departure of her plane to Istanbul. She noticed that Henry Miles wandered about for a little while and then found a seat nearby, sat down and lighted a cigarette. They exchanged impersonal glances and then Miles endeared himself to Mrs. Pollifax by slowly, wickedly closing one eyelid and winking at her. Until that wink he had appeared curiously invisible, totally lacking in personality and content, as if he drew himself in flat chalk and then erased all but the outline. Now Mrs. Pollifax realized that a second Henry Miles walked, sat, stood and breathed inside that first Henry Miles, although a few seconds later, her glance returning, it was impossible to believe in that other personage, he looked so buttoned-up again.

The flight to Istanbul was announced, and Mrs. Pollifax boarded the plane and took her seat near the wing, with Miles several rows in front of her. This time she acquired a seat companion, and one who arrived breathlessly, with every male including Henry turning his head to stare at her. Mrs. Pollifax stared, too—she had never seen anyone quite like her before, which made the encounter educational as well. The girl was very young; she was dressed in an incredible outfit of dramatic greens and purples crowned with a brilliant green stovepipe hat which she removed almost at once, displaying a flawless profile. Her eyelids and her lips had been painted white, her long eyelashes were ink black, and she wore her straight red-gold hair to the waist. Once she had settled her bag and her magazines she turned to look at Mrs. Pollifax with equal interest, gazed frankly at the wisps of hair escaping Mrs. Pollifax's flowered hat, met her admiring and startled glance and smiled.

"Hello," she said, adding with a burst of candor. "Do I frighten you? I do some of my mother's friends—not that Mother has many pious friends but she does have tons of pious acquaintances, Daddy being an M.P."

"Parliament!" said Mrs. Pollifax rapturously.

"You're American!" exclaimed the girl. "What fun! Yes, Daddy's in Parliament, and I've just become a model, isn't it wonderful? It's terribly exciting. I hope to be an actress, but I think modeling's a marv way

to begin. I'm on my way to Athens for a job. Tony and the cameras are already there—they're doing me in autumn clothes against the Acropolis and all that."

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Pollifax, beaming, and then, "I'd forgotten we stop at Athens. I'm going all the way through to Istanbul."

The girl's face lit up. "I say, that's wonderful! My brother's there. If I've time after the assignment I'm hoping to fly over and see him." A faint shadow dimmed her preposterously radiant face. "At least I hope he's still there," she added darkly. "He has such an awful time with just—well, just the *mechanics* of living. It's unbelievable." She sighed and tucked her young chin in the palm of her hand.

"What does he do in Istanbul?" asked Mrs. Pollifax, intrigued by her concern.

"Well, he's been given a job with Uncle Hubert," she explained. "But of course you wouldn't know what that means unless you knew my family. It means, translated, that everybody's simply given up on Colin—my brother—and nobody knows what else to do with him." She frowned. "I suppose every large family has one."

"One what?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

The girl hesitated, and then said angrily, "Somebody who just doesn't fit, you know? And that person knows it and grows up—well, grows up feeling *invisible*. And it turns into a vicious circle because it's so desperately easy not to notice someone invisible, but nobody understands this."

Mrs. Pollifax smiled faintly. She decided she liked this girl. "You're fond of him then. But being fond is a form of understanding."

"Oh I understand what's wrong," the girl said earnestly. "But not how to help. Colin has no confidence, just no confidence at all, and because of this he absolutely bristles with hostility. He's gotten battered, you know? He's very precise by nature but he can't find anything to be precise about, if you know what I mean, and this is infuriating for him and he loathes himself. But although I understand all this I'm very bad for him because he brings out the maternal in me. I'm a Moon Child, you see—born under the sign of Cancer, and simply seething with motherly instincts. He hates that. Quite rightly, too—he's terribly intelligent, of course. Oh I do hope I'll have time to stop and see him, but I despair," she explained dramatically. "There's never enough time. It'll rain, and the filming get held up for days—things always happen like that in this business."

"You could write to your brother then," suggested Mrs. Pollifax comfortingly.

The girl turned her head and stared wonderingly at Mrs. Pollifax.

"Write?" she repeated blankly, and Mrs. Pollifax understood that she had stumbled upon a word utterly foreign to this girl and her generation.

"It's a way to keep in touch."

"In touch," repeated the girl musingly. "Yes, we do rocket about a great deal, my friends and I. But still I know what you mean. I think 'in touch' is a beautiful expression, don't you? And yet I do feel in touch with Colin always, even when I never see him."

"Then you have something very rare and wonderful," pointed out Mrs. Pollifax. "A bond."

The girl nodded, beaming now. "You do see it, don't you. But what takes you to Istanbul, and why Istanbul?"

Why indeed, thought Mrs. Pollifax, and announced that she was going to do a little sightseeing, and also meet a friend there. "An old friend who has been exploring the Middle East," she added firmly.

"But that's marv," said the girl. "Oh I do wonder if—how long will you be in Istanbul?"

"Until Saturday morning," said Mrs. Pollifax calmly. "I wonder if I can guess what you're thinking."

The girl laughed delightedly. "Of course you can because you're a dear, I can tell, and probably psychic as well. But you know, Colin just *might* be useful to you, having been in Istanbul for four months. And if I shouldn't have the time to fly over to see him—it's vital Colin feel that somebody cares—"

"Being a Moon Child," said Mrs. Pollifax gravely.

"Well, I truly can't help it, can I? And nobody else cares, not really, except in a generalized family sense, and only when something goes hideously *wrong*, if you know what I mean. Of course I shouldn't want to burden you—"

Mrs. Pollifax smiled. "If you'll give me his address I'll try. I can't promise anything but there might be time."

"Oh you *are* a dear," the girl said, and removing a ring from her finger handed it to Mrs. Pollifax. "Give him this, that's the important thing. It's his, really, he gave it to me when he left. It's a game we've played for years, handing it back and forth for luck. I wore it when he went off to Oxford—except he flunked out," she explained with a sigh. "Then he wore it when he sold vacuum cleaners—but Mother was the only one who bought one—and then he sold encyclopedias, or did he work at Fortnum's next? Oh brother I can't remember. Anyway, give him this and my love."

"But this is a valuable signet ring," pointed out Mrs. Pollifax. "And really there may be no time at all—"

"Then you can just tuck it into an envelope and mail it back to me I'll give you my address as well," she said. She had begun laboriously printing on a sheet of memo with a small address book propped on her knee. When she handed it to Mrs. Pollifax it read:

COLIN RAMSEY,
RAMSEY ENTERPRISES LTD.
23 ZIKZAK DAR SOKAK, STAMBOUL.

To this she had added,

MISS MIA RAMSEY
C/O HEATHERTON AGENCY,
PICCADILLY CIRCUS, LONDON W.1

"And I am Emily Pollifax," said Mrs. Pollifax, feeling that introductions were being made, if half of them on paper. "Also a Moon Child," she added with a twinkle.

"No! Are you really?" demanded Mia breathlessly. "Then that's what I felt at once. Colin's Capricorn, you know, that's why he's so inherently precise."

"My husband was a Libra," put in Mrs. Pollifax.

"But how marv," breathed the girl. "Charm? Diplomacy? Harmony?"

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Pollifax, nodding.

"Most of my family's Gemini," Mia added broodingly. "A very restless sign to be born under, you know. Tony's Libra," she confided. "He wants to marry me."

"Tony?"

"The man in charge of all this," she said with a sweeping gesture that apparently included her outrageous costume. "The one waiting for me in Athens. He's a marv photographer."

"And do you love him?" asked Mrs. Pollifax with interest.

Mia turned thoughtful. "I'm only eighteen, you know. Do you think it possible to love at eighteen?"

"In general no," said Mrs. Pollifax.

Mia nodded. "That's what I think, too. It's tempting — and terribly romantic — but I do want to find out who I am first. I don't want to be married umpteen times. It's so unstable."

At this point they were interrupted by lunch — the meals were growing very confusing—and then they were nearing Athens, and Mrs. Pollifax watched Mia reline her lips and eyelids with white, and comb her long hair. As the plane touched earth and taxied down the runway Mia

looked at Mrs. Pollifax with huge eyes. "Do you realize we may never meet again?" she said in dismay, and was suddenly a very young child.

Mrs. Pollifax smiled. "But it's so very nice that we've met at all," she said warmly.

Mia laughed. "There I go, being greedy again—you're much the wiser." Standing, she leaned over and impulsively kissed Mrs. Pollifax on the cheek. "God bless," she said warmly, and placing her stovepipe hat securely on the top of her head she walked down the aisle, every eye on the plane fastened just as securely upon her receding figure.

Mrs. Pollifax watched her go. She thought she left behind her a very definite fragrance not of an orchid in spite of her exotic green and purple appearance, she reflected, but something rather sturdy and British, like a primrose. Yes, a primrose, decided Mrs. Pollifax, and with a little smile brought out her travel guide on Turkey again, and settled down to read it.

CHAPTER 4

MRS. POLLIFAX LANDED AT AN AIRPORT WHOSE NAME SHE COULD not pronounce, and went through Customs in a state of numbness. Not even a glimpse of her first mosque or the delicate spire of a minaret roused her from this alarming sense of detachment; she was experiencing now the effect of crossing two continents and an ocean in the space of a day. She remembered that she had been contacted by Carstairs at two o'clock on a quiet Sunday afternoon, she had left the United States less than two hours later, and she had been in flight for seventeen hours, with a brief stopover in London. In America it would be Monday morning and she would be preparing to shop at the A&P, but instead she was in Istanbul and it was four o'clock Monday afternoon, all of which produced a bewildered weightless and unattached feeling: it was difficult to realize that she had reached Istanbul, or how, or for what purpose. As the airline bus carried her toward the city there was added to her blurredness a steady cacophony of noise: horns honking, donkeys braying, and vendors shouting.

When Mrs. Pollifax reached the Oteli Itep and registered at the desk, showing her passport, it was five o'clock. There was no sign of Henry, which reminded her that they were in Istanbul now and there would be no more reassuring winks. The desk clerk himself showed her to her room on the second floor and left her staring, mesmerized, at the bed.

And the bed really was enchanting. It was mounted on a platform that made it the focal point of the room, it was covered with a brilliant scarlet afghan and what was more it looked voluptuously soft. Mrs. Pollifax moved toward it with longing, every bone of her body still in protest against the reclining seats into which she had been fitted for so long. She reached up to her flowered hat, fumbled for its hatpin and then hesitated. She remembered that in fewer than three hours she must take up

her post in the lobby with her copy of *Gone with the Wind* — it was why she was here — and by that hour she must be alert and rested. She had already done a great deal of sleeping on the plane, and another nap could only leave her woolly-headed. A more sensible idea would be to find something to occupy and clear her mind. She thought of food but she was not hungry enough to spend the next hour in dining, and in any case she would prefer breakfast to dinner, her appetite being still on American time. Yet somehow before eight o'clock she had to recover a degree of perception and awareness, and enough vitality to think clearly.

"A walk!" she thought. "A good brisk walk!" It was the perfect idea, jewel-like in its simplicity and wisdom after so many hours of tedium. She wondered if the bazaars would be open at this hour, doubted, and immediately suffered a loss of motivation until she remembered Mia Ramsey's brother.

"What a very nice idea, and it shouldn't take long!" she exclaimed aloud, and at once felt a leap of interest and purpose. She dug the brother's address out of her purse, noted that they were both in the old part of the city but decided nevertheless to take a taxi there and do her walking on the way back.

Washing her face in very cold water she left the room without opening her suitcase, walked down the heavily carpeted stairs to the lobby, nodded cheerfully to the desk clerk and strolled out into the bustling life of the streets.

According to her map Istanbul was a city divided by bridges, water and the geographical coincidence of existing upon two continents, Europe and Asia. Mrs. Pollifax assessed the character of it with a certain feminine casualness: the newer section, called Beyoglu, contained the Hilton Istanbul, and therefore must also contain the newer residences, the higher priced hotels, and most of the tourists. The older section, called Stamboul, appeared to hold most of the minarets, mosques, bazaars, native hotels as well as herself and Mia Ramsey's brother. With this settled she hailed a taxi. The driver greeted her effusively, swore by Allah that Zikzak was not far, that his taxi was the best in Stamboul, he was a fine driver and it was a beautiful evening, and they started out.

Delighted by her resourcefulness and already reviving at the thought of exchanging words with an authentic resident of the city, Mrs. Pollifax sat back in anticipation. What struck her forcibly as she looked around her was the patina of antiquity everywhere that went beyond old age; there was a grandeur in the shabbiness of Stamboul's flaking walls, peeling stucco, faded paint and eroded columns. It rested the eye: this

city was thousands of years old. Istanbul also impressed her now as being a surprisingly gay place, and her ears began to sort out the sounds that had dismayed her earlier. A great deal of commerce appeared to be transacted from the sides and backs of donkeys, upon which were carried baskets of flowers, bread, tinware, bales of cloth, jugs of water, herbs and sweets, all of which had to be advertised incessantly and vocally, the louder the better. Children played and shouted. Strange weird music drifted out of shuttered windows and open doors. The light itself was purest Mediterranean—why had she assumed Istanbul would be gloomy?—and as they drove up and down unbelievably steep streets Mrs. Pollifax was reminded of San Francisco.

But gradually the streets grew narrower, darker and less traveled, and Mrs. Pollifax began to experience a growing sense of alarm. After all, they were in search of a business called Ramsey Enterprises Ltd., which had a solid, respectable and undeniably British ring to it, whereas this was old Istanbul, and growing older and older at each turn. For the first time she remembered the two envelopes in her purse, each of them bulging with money, and when the taxi turned into a cul-de-sac, a dead end alley with a high wall running along one side, Mrs. Pollifax was certain that she was going to be held up and robbed. She was wondering if she dared try out her karate—and which blow to deliver—when the driver brought the cab to a stop, jerked his head toward a ramshackle building on the left which leaned precariously to one side, and turning to her said, "Twenty-three Zikzak."

"Are you sure?" she asked doubtfully. She handed the printed address to the driver for verification.

"Evet, evet," he said, nodding indignantly, and jumped out and opened the door for her.

Mrs. Pollifax climbed out, paid the man—or over-paid him, she reflected wryly, having still no firm grasp of the country's lira and kurush—and when she walked across the alley to the lopsided door experienced the small shock of relief at discovering all her suspicions unfounded. The man was reliable and she was indeed in the correct place. But what an astonishingly unprepossessing place it was! A neat sign over the bell said RAMSEY ENTERPRISES LTD. A small dusty sign below it read RAMSEY DOCUMENTARIES IN REAR (Documentaries! thought Mrs. Pollifax); a third sign read HUBERT LUDLOW RAMSEY, ESQ. Mrs. Pollifax pushed the bell. Nothing happened. Sounds of traffic came dimly to her ears, and among the wilting bougainvillea a bee droned monotonously. From the other side of the alley's wall came shouts of muffled argument, and from a distance the sound of a

muezzin's chant. Mrs. Pollifax turned her back on the front door and walked firmly down the narrow, beaten-earth driveway toward RAMSEY DOCUMENTARIES IN REAR.

She came out upon a small cobbled courtyard walled with bougainvillea. A dusty van was parked here beside an equally dusty old jeep, and beyond them lay a series of small cement-block buildings, obviously quite new: a garage, a building with two skylights, and a small office bearing a sign *RAMSEY ENTERPRISES*. The door to this office stood open, and as Mrs. Pollifax approached it she heard someone swearing—steadily and scathingly in English.

"Good afternoon," called out Mrs. Pollifax cheerfully.

The swearing immediately broke off, and a round, owlish face peered around the door. "What the devil!" exclaimed the young man in baffled astonishment, and then, "I say –I'm awfully sorry, you overheard the swearing?"

"Every word," said Mrs. Pollifax amiably. "Is it a habit of yours?"

"It's rapidly becoming one," he said crossly from somewhere inside ("I'm putting on a shirt," he explained in an aside). "I'm swearing because I've been doing some filming while my uncle's away and not one damned frame has come out yet. My uncle will have my head for it. No, he'll probably fire me."

"Why didn't the pictures come out?" inquired Mrs. Pollifax curiously.

His voice drew closer. "Because yesterday I left the lens cap on, and today they're all light-struck." He suddenly appeared in the door, a small, compact young man wearing a fierce scowl, dusty khaki shorts, dusty shirt and dusty boots.

"Then you must be Colin Ramsey," said Mrs. Pollifax warmly, extending her hand. "You have to be Colin Ramsey."

"I don't have to be but I am," he said suspiciously. "Are you a friend of Uncle Hu's?"

"No, of your sister's," she told him. "That is, I flew from London to Athens with her today my name's Mrs. Pollifax and if I had time she asked me to stop in and give you both her love and this ring."

His face brightened. "Did she really! I say, that's decent of her." He took the ring and looked at it. "Beautiful Mia—what on earth is she doing in Athens! I suppose she's left school again?"

"I didn't hear anything about school; she's modeling."

He nodded, still staring down at the ring. "Funny," he mused, "this came from Uncle Hu when we were still in the nursery, I'd forgotten its source until this minute. He gave it me, said it was magic or some such

bit of whimsy, and for years I wore it faithfully on a string around my neck. That's how it all started, and here I am working for Uncle Hu now, and the ring's here, too." His laugh was so bitter it startled him as well as Mrs. Pollifax and he glanced up. "It's really decent of you to have bothered with this, and I'm being terribly rude, boring you with my blighted life. May I offer you a lemonade?"

"You weren't being rude, you were feeling sorry for yourself," pointed out Mrs. Pollifax firmly. "And yes it *was* decent of me, except that I had too much time for just eating and not enough time for sleeping because of having to be back at the hotel before eight. Also I was curious. Yes, I will have a lemonade, thank you."

"Curious because of Mia?" he asked.

"Not entirely. I thought it restful —soothing, you know—to have a small errand to run, and the name and address of someone here, in a strange city and strange country." She stopped and suddenly smiled. "It just occurs to me: I'm probably feeling a touch of homesickness. Or rather of not-at-homeness."

He nodded. "Your first trip abroad?"

Mrs. Pollifax smiled faintly. "Yes and no," she said adroitly. "The first alone, at least."

"Then do come and have that lemonade," he suggested understandingly. "Although if you're traveling alone who's the chap with you, your driver? Guide?"

Mrs. Pollifax looked at him blankly. "There's no one with me. I came in a taxi but the driver went away." She turned, following Colin's glance up the driveway to the alley. "What is it?"

He grinned. "Some tourist —a chap in a dark suit with a camera. He's strolled past twice, trying not to look too interested in us. Tourists don't usually get this far."

Henry, thought Mrs. Pollifax warmly. But how absolutely astute of him, she reflected, he had not for a moment forsaken his post, he had seen her leave and followed. A rush of gratitude flooded her at such touching protectiveness, and then she put the thought aside and turned and followed Colin toward the house. "But how do you happen to notice such things?" she asked of Colin, responding at once to such an active imagination.

He smiled ruefully as he held open the door to the house. "Compensation, I guess —observation is my only talent. I'm a complete embarrassment to a brilliant family—it's why they've shipped me out here to Turkey."

Mrs. Pollifax entered a bleak, cheerless kitchen dominated by a very

old refrigerator with coils on the top. "Purest Soho, circa 1920," commented Colin with a gesture toward the room. "Do have a seat."

Mrs. Pollifax slid gratefully onto a bench beside a long trestle table. "But what kind of brilliant family?" she asked. "That is, if you could use just one word—"

"That's easy," said Colin, removing ice cube trays from the antique refrigerator. "Successful."

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "But in what way? What values?"

He scowled. "Well, they climb mountains. Big ones," he added angrily. "They excel at rugby and take honors at Oxford and rather tend to get knighted. They go into the Army and win medals, that sort of thing. My father's an M.P. My two brothers went to Sandhurst and they'll either be generals or M.P.s, wait and see. You met my sister. She's the baby of the family, but if she's taken up modeling she'll be a top model on all the magazine covers by Christmas. My mother's a poet and the last time I saw a London *Times* she was in jail for picketing —some kind of labor protest. That's being a success these days too, you know." He gloomily handed Mrs. Pollifax a frosty glass of lemonade and sat down across the table from her.

Mrs. Pollifax said tartly, "I think someone in your family read far too much Halliburton in their youth. But if they're active and extroverted and like heights, that's their prerogative. What do *you* like best?"

He looked thoughtful. "It's hard to say, you know. I'm an absolute physical coward. I daresay that's something most people don't have to learn about themselves by the age of eight, but living with my family I learned it early. Alpine climbing absolutely terrifies me, boxing appalls me and fencing scares the hell out of me. The Army didn't turn out to be my cup of tea and I flunked out of Oxford." He brightened. "Frankly I like it *here*. It's a joy having nobody care that I'm a Ramsey, and Uncle Hu doesn't care tuppence about climbing mountains, he's too busy running this rum outfit. But damn it I'm desperately afraid that just when I've found the right nook I shall blow it. Failure *can* get to be a habit, you know."

"Nonsense," put in Mrs. Pollifax flatly.

"But just see what's happened. Uncle Hu goes off to Erzurum with his projection man for a week, and after showing me the work for four months he leaves me with just ten minutes of filming, the first assignment he's given me, and I'm already blowing the whole thing. He runs a shoe-string operation; I ask you, how long can he afford me?"

Mrs. Pollifax glanced curiously around the barren room. "You mean this address is all there is to Ramsey Enterprises Ltd.?"

Colin nodded. "Mostly it's a matter of traveling around the country

he comes back here to splice and develop film and pick up his mail. He has a tie-in with the British Council. Winters he puts chains and a snowplow on the van and goes on tour, as he calls it. Shows Turkish films in the *hata series*—the council houses in the villages and occasionally shows films from England. There are thousands of little villages in Turkey and for some of them it's the only contact they have with the outside world except for the traveling schoolteacher. But his real passion is making documentaries about Turkey he really loves the place. In the summer he drops everything for this, he'll take on any assignment he can get—travelogs, industrial films, commercials, short subjects, that sort of thing."

"And works all alone!" exclaimed Mrs. Pollifax.

Colin smiled wryly. "There's scarcely enough money in it for a crowd, but he does all right. As you can see, he picks up people like me when it pleases him, and then there are students in the summer, and in the winter there are mechanics and out-of-work seasonal people. It's all very casual but it functions."

"And your family like him?"

Colin wrinkled his nose. "Everything's relative, isn't it? He used to be *Sir* Hubert, with all the usual Ramsey accomplishments. Medals. Honors. Came out of World War Two loaded with that sort of thing, was knighted by the King and then one day took all the medals, flushed 'em down the toilet, packed a duffel bag and left England. A woman, my mother said. No, they don't *like* him but they leave him alone." He sighed. "It's hard to explain my family, they're not monsters, you know, they're marvelous really. Colorful, competitive, uninhibited, uncomplicated. I'd have absolutely no problems at all if well, if "

"If you were also colorful, competitive, uninhibited and uncomplicated," said Mrs. Pollifax, nodding.

"Yes." He grinned at her appreciatively. "But what brings you to Turkey?" he asked.

Mrs. Pollifax suddenly remembered why she was in Turkey and a sense of dismay chilled her. "The time!" she gasped, and looked at her watch only to discover that it had stopped. "Have you the correct time? I'm to meet a woman at eight o'clock in the lobby of my hotel."

Colin at once came to life. "I say I'll take you back in the jeep! It's the least I can do after your bringing Mia's message, and it'll take my mind off my disasters." He glanced at his watch. "It's not quite seven three minutes lacking. I wish there were more time, I could show you St. Sophia's on the way. Are you meeting your friend for dinner?"

"Friend?" Mrs. Pollifax was caught off guard. "Oh no—that is, I

would like to take her to dinner but I don't know her. I mean, I don't know that she'll have the time for it. I'm only delivering -" She stopped, utterly appalled at the words she was letting slip. Really she must be more tired than she'd realized.

Colin Ramsey was smiling at her. "You know, you act just the way I do sometimes, but I can't think when or why. You stammered."

"I'm tired."

He shook his head. "No, you're nervous."

"Well, I shall be very nervous indeed if I'm late," she said, regaining control. "How long will it take us to reach the Itep?"

"The Itep!" he said. "Not the Hilton?"

Mrs. Pollifax suddenly and overwhelmingly realized why she was drawn to Colin, and she felt a small sense of alarm. They were alike. They had each lived quiet lives in the shadow of more dazzling personalities so that, somewhat submerged but no less intelligent, they had become observers. Acute observers. She recognized at once from Colin's question—so very akin to what she too would have noted that he was weighing the Oteli Itep against what he saw and guessed of her, and the Itep did not fit, it introduced an unguessed facet of character that entertained and alerted him.

"The Itep, yes," she said firmly.

He looked amused. He arose and rinsed the two glasses under the faucet automatically, as if he were accustomed to looking after himself, probably over hot plates and wash basins in grubby London rooms, she guessed. "Ever ridden in a jeep before?" he asked as he led her across the courtyard.

"Never."

"All you have to do is hang on tight," he explained. "Hold your skirt down and your hat on." He glanced at her hat and smiled faintly. "It will be an experience for you."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Pollifax, realizing that he believed he was giving her an event in an uneventful life.

"But I still hope you'll dine with me, which is what I was leading up to," he confided. "Blast it, I've eaten alone for three days now, and if you don't mind awfully, I'll wait and see what plans you make with your friend." He added wistfully, "I could show you both something of Istanbul, you know—it's beautiful at night. The Galata Bridge, the moon over the Golden Horn, and St. Sophia's at night is unbelievable. We could eat at Pierre Loti's, and—"

She felt the undercurrent of his eagerness: he was lonely. She said gently, "We'll see, shall we?"

"I'll park outside the hotel and wait until quarter past the hour," he

said. "It's no hardship, you know, the streets of Istanbul are never boring." He shifted gears and they were off, sending up clouds of dust, and Mrs. Pollifax became too busy clinging to her hat to exchange further comments.

CHAPTER 5

IT WAS 7:35 WHEN MRS. POLLIFAX ENTERED THE LOBBY OF THE Oteli Itep, leaving Colin behind to look for a parking space and wait his alloted span of moments. She went upstairs, again washed her face in cold water, removed *Gone with the Wind* from her suitcase and locked her door behind her. Her mind was now functioning without blurredness; she was suddenly a courier, a secret agent, and she arranged the expression on her face accordingly. She realized that she ought to have taken the time earlier to explore the hotel—it would have been the professional thing to do—and so she walked upstairs instead of down—the hotel had no elevator—and discovered that the third floor was the top one. There was an interesting metal door to the roof: she tested it, looked out upon an expanse of flat tile, nodded approvingly and chose the narrow back stairs for her descent, virtually tiptoeing lest anyone point out that they were reserved for hotel personnel. The stairs ended in a shabby first floor landing with three exits: one into the lobby, one to the street, and the last to the basement. Pleased with her tour, Mrs. Pollifax walked into the lobby and sat down, book in hand, at precisely ten minutes before the hour.

It was a very Turkish lobby, its floor glowing with the colors and design of an unusually fine Turkish rug. The remainder of it was furnished with baroque statuary and old leather couches. Mrs. Pollifax had taken the couch near the back stairs, at some distance from the front, so that she was well out of the traffic between the main entrance and the larger staircase, and prominently displayed against the only window in the lobby. In fact she judged it to be the most conspicuous place possible, and she carefully arranged her book so that it was equally as conspicuous. With considerable suspense she watched the hands of the clock move slowly toward eight. The lobby was small, and there were only a

few people waiting. Henry Miles had come in and was seated in a corner looking nearly invisible again, his eyes half-closed as if he were dozing. A young couple held hands in another corner and two men smoked and gossiped along the other wall.

It was when Henry glanced up that Mrs. Pollifax also looked to the entrance and became alert. It was precisely eight o'clock and a woman had entered the hotel. She brought with her a quality that changed the lobby so forcibly that Mrs. Pollifax wondered how people continued to walk and talk without awareness of it. What she brought with her—and to Mrs. Pollifax it pervaded the lobby—was fear. No, not fear but terror, amended Mrs. Pollifax: a primitive, palpable terror so real that it could almost be smelled and touched. The woman stood at the edge of the lobby, desperately trying not to be seen as her glance searched the room. Did her eyes ever so subtly drop to the gaudy book that Mrs. Pollifax held upright in her lap?

She cannot bear exposure, thought Mrs. Pollifax in astonishment; yet as she stood there, lacking the decisiveness to move, she was accomplishing exactly what she did not want: people were beginning to look at her. And certainly she was not a logical person to have entered a hotel lobby. Her dress was torn, old and shabby, the castoff plaid house dress of a European, and she was thin to the point of emaciation. But her face—what a beauty she must have been once, thought Mrs. Pollifax, seeing those deepset haunted dark eyes. Even her clothes, even the irresolution and exhaustion could not conceal the intelligence in those eyes. That head went up now, and the woman moved like a sleepwalker across the lobby until she came to Mrs. Pollifax. "Your book," she said in a low voice, only lightly accented. "You are—?"

"Sit down," Mrs. Pollifax said quickly. "You'll be less conspicuous and you do look exhausted."

The woman sank down beside her on the couch. "Who are you?"

"Emily Pollifax. Are you being followed?" Beyond the woman, on the other side of the window, Mrs. Pollifax saw Colin Ramsey sitting in his jeep. He had found his parking space and was patiently waiting for dinner companions. She felt that she had met and talked to him in another world, a world of innocence that had abruptly vanished at sight of this poor creature.

"I don't know, but—it is possible," whispered Ferenci-Sabo. "I should never have chosen this place—so far, so public, so open." She looked utterly wrung out, drained.

Mrs. Pollifax said crisply, "I've brought you money and a passport but obviously you need rest and food before you can use either. There's a rear exit on my left, do you see it? There are also stairs going up to the

second floor. My room number is " She broke off, startled. The woman beside her on the couch was staring across the lobby in horror. At once she jumped to her feet. "Oh please," she gasped.

Automatically Mrs. Pollifax glanced at the entrance to see what had frightened her; when her glance returned to the couch the woman was gone. She had vanished completely.

Two men in the uniform of the Turkish police were crossing the lobby, and one of them suddenly increased his pace, heading for the rear exit. His companion continued inexorably toward Mrs. Pollifax, and as he loomed above her he looked surprisingly high she doubtfully rose to meet him.

"*Pasaport, luften,*" he said, holding out a hand.

"Passport?" faltered Mrs. Pollifax. "But what has happened? Do you speak English?"

"You are American? English?"

"American." She opened her purse, careful not to touch the second passport.

He opened and scanned the passport, glancing from face to photograph and back again. "You arrived here only this afternoon, I see." He frowned. "Your business in Istanbul?"

"Why—tourist," she faltered.

"The woman to whom you spoke —the one who fled—" He broke off as his comrade entered the lobby through the side door. His friend shook his head, pointed to the ceiling and disappeared again, presumably to search the hotel. Mrs. Pollifax's inquisitor nodded. "You will come with me please to headquarters, to Santral Odasi." His request lacked the courtesy of an invitation; his voice was authoritative, as was the hand he placed beneath Mrs. Pollifax's elbow. He had also retained her passport, which he placed now in his pocket. She had no recourse but to go. As they walked out, leaving by the side door, she was just in time to see Colin shift gears, maneuver out of his parking space and drive away, his profile without any expression except boredom, as if he had at last relinquished all hope of dinner companions. He did not even see her.

The officer behind the desk was in uniform; the second man, seated beyond him and introduced as Mr. Piskopos, was not. As Mrs. Pollifax seated herself she was aware that both men studied her coldly and clinically, as if to wrest from her who and what she was by psychic divination. She had the feeling that neither of them noticed her hat or her suit, or even the expression on her face, but looked beyond and inside, into motivation, into why her hands remained in her lap, why she gazed at them imperturbably and what she had to be concealing. Since at the mo-

ment she was concealing a great deal, Mrs. Pollifax practiced exorcising all memory of Carstairs and Alice Dexter White. She was an American tourist, she reminded herself, an American tourist . . .

"I am an American tourist," she said aloud in reply to the police officer.

Her passport lay open in front of him. He said dryly, "We have suddenly this week so many visitors to Istanbul. All tourists. This woman you were speaking to in the lobby of the Hotel Itep . . . you were there to meet her?"

"No," said Mrs. Pollifax calmly. "I was sitting in the lobby of the Hotel Itep resting before dinner."

"But you were speaking with this woman, were you not?"

"Oh yes."

"But you did not know the woman to whom you were speaking?"

Mrs. Pollifax said truthfully, "I had never seen her before in my life."

"That is not the point," said the police officer quietly. "Had you an arrangement to meet her, to speak to her?"

"She came up to me and asked for money," said Mrs. Pollifax firmly, "and I must say she looked as if she needed it."

"In what language did she accost you?"

"English," said Mrs. Pollifax, and suddenly realized the trap that had been set for her.

"English," he repeated politely. "In a Turkish hotel run by Turks, in the old section of Istanbul where few tourists lodge, a woman beggar comes up to you and speaks in English?"

"She must have guessed I was American," pointed out Mrs. Pollifax.

"Still, if she was only a beggar it is unusual that she could speak your language, is it not?"

Mrs. Pollifax sighed. "If you say so, but why is all this so important? Who is she?"

He looked faintly amused. He removed a square of cardboard from beneath his desk blotter and handed it across the desk to her, saying smoothly, "This is the woman to whom you were speaking." It was a question, yet stated so artfully that it was also a statement; he left it up to her to dispute or accept.

Looking at the snapshot he gave her Mrs. Pollifax saw that Mr. Carstairs and the New York *Times* might lack a photograph of Ferenci-Sabo, but that a very up-to-date one had begun circulating through Istanbul. It was certainly a picture of the woman she had met at the Itep, and a very recent one of her too. The eyes were half-closed, the face haggard and thin. Then Mrs. Pollifax noticed the dress Ferenci-Sabo was wearing, the same faded plaid, and she realized with astonishment that this snap-

shot had been taken of Ferenci-Sabo since she had reached Istanbul on Friday.

Had it been taken at the consulate? she wondered. In the confusion of the woman's arrival had someone really snapped her picture—or had it been taken of her *after* her abduction?

She looked at the police officer curiously. Was it possible that the Turkish government could have arranged Magda Ferenci-Sabo's abduction from the British consulate? For the first time she realized how important a defecting Communist agent must be to *them*. Russia was Turkey's next-door neighbor, their frontiers met and their guards faced each other for several hundred miles in the east. A great deal of practical information could be extracted from a knowledgeable Communist defector, and why should they share her when it was they who lived virtually under Russia's guns?

"Well?" demanded the police officer. "Is that the woman?"

"There's a resemblance certainly but beyond that—she left so suddenly! Who is she?" Mrs. Pollifax inquired again. When he ignored this she said quietly, "I really think I must refuse to answer your questions until I am told precisely why I am here, or am allowed to telephone someone who can inform me why I am here." She added severely, "I had understood Turkey was a country friendly to Americans—"

"To Americans, yes," the man said flatly.

She was surprised. "You don't believe that I'm American?"

The officer turned and exchanged a swift glance with the civilian behind him. "That is a possibility," he said.

"But my passport—"

He looked at her pityingly. "Passports can be forged." He hesitated and then leaned forward, frankly watching her face as he said with deliberation, "The woman to whom you were speaking is a woman wanted by the Turkish police, and one whom Officer Bey almost captured this evening. Her friends are of much interest to us—they may be our enemies. You arrived in Istanbul several hours ago, flying here directly without any tourist stops in between, and you meet this woman. A coincidence? We shall see." He touched her passport with a finger. "In the meantime—while we very thoroughly investigate your identity we shall keep your passport."

She said indignantly, "I really must protest "

He interrupted with a shrug. "You will, of course, notify your consul we shall do this as well but you are not to leave Istanbul, or the Hotel Itep, until you have been cleared to the satisfaction of all concerned." His expression lightened. "We should be able to return to you the passport by late tomorrow afternoon if your credentials, how do

you call it, check out. You may return now to your hotel, please." He did not shake hands; the other man, Mr. Piskopos, nodded curtly, and Mrs. Pollifax left.

In the police car, as it carried her back to her hotel, Mrs. Pollifax experienced something of the loneliness of the outcast. She had successfully met Ferenci-Sabo—this much was now obvious—only to see the woman frightened away; and now she had ignominiously lost her passport for twenty-four hours. What did she do next? What *could* she do? Did she go again tomorrow night to the lobby at the same hour? She could imagine Officer Bey's face should he see her there a second time at the same hour and clutching the same copy of *Gone with the Wind*. She did not concede failure as yet but she did admit to a deep discouragement and a certain amount of frustration.

She saw the hotel ahead, its exterior no longer nondescript at night under a blaze of neon color; somewhere along the pavement that other, nameless American agent had been pinned to a wall by an automobile. Mrs. Pollifax leaned forward. The taxi ahead of them slowed, turned, and pulled into the only empty space in front of the Itep to discharge Henry Miles—dear Henry, she thought fondly, and wondered what significance he had attached to her visit to police headquarters. His taxi drove away and as the police car in which she rode headed into the narrow opening another taxi suddenly cut in ahead of them, almost sideswiping them; a man leaped from it in a great hurry, pulled bills from his pockets, shoved them at the driver through the window and turned to run into the hotel. But something arrested him; he stopped, put his hands into his pockets and very casually sauntered across the pavement to the hotel. What he had seen, realized Mrs. Pollifax, was the back of Henry Miles disappearing into the lobby.

He was following Henry! thought Mrs. Pollifax in astonishment. It was no more than an impression but it was a vivid one: the haste, the panic, the fear of having lost sight of the subject, followed by the abrupt halt and even more abrupt change to casualness.

Only a few yards from here—somewhere beyond the front entrance, Carstairs had said—that other agent had been killed on Sunday night.

I can't let that happen to Henry—there must be some way to warn him, she thought in horror. Carstairs had said, *There may be a leak somewhere, or with so damn many agents in Istanbul they may be keeping one another under surveillance*, but what if Henry didn't know he had acquired a shadow?

She thanked her driver and walked into the hotel. There was no sign of Henry in the empty lobby. To the man at the desk she said, "There is

an Englishman staying here, I saw him drop this earlier." She held up her small travel guide to Turkey and smiled at the man. "If you tell me his room number I should like to return it to him."

The translations took a few minutes and drew in the manager's son, who was fourteen and "took the English" in school, but had apparently not ventured beyond nouns and pronouns, and very few of those. A dictionary was produced and each word spelled out before it was understood what she wanted, and the boy offered to take the book himself to room 214.

"No, no—thank you," said Mrs. Pollifax, and then with another look at the dictionary added, "*Tesekkur edehim*, no."

She walked up the stairs, ignored her own door and continued down the hall. The door to room 214 stood ajar and the lights were on. She tapped lightly. When there was neither reply nor movement she tapped again and then swung the door wide and peered inside. "Henry?" she called in a low voice. She recognized his green suitcase on the bed, its contents scattered all over the coverlet as if it had been unpacked by the simple expedient of turning it upside down. Then she saw that every drawer in the tall chest along the wall had been left open, and his trenchcoat lay on the floor in shreds. She realized that while Henry had waited patiently for her outside the police station someone had been searching his room. But who? And where was Henry?

The curtains opening to the balcony trembled slightly, catching Mrs. Pollifax's eye, and her glance moved from the curtains to the open window and then to the darkness beyond. She shivered suddenly. *I'm not supposed to be here*, she thought. *I'm not even supposed to know Henry, and certainly I mustn't be found here calling out his name.* His absence was alarming. Had he unlocked his door, switched on the light and retreated when he saw the state of his room? Was he even now down in the lobby complaining to the manager she had just left? Or had he stopped first in the public lavatory at the end of the hall?

She backed out of the room, touching nothing, and walked down the hall to the bathroom, but the door stood open and the room was empty. Mrs. Pollifax unlocked the door of her own room and flicked on the lights. Everything was in order, nothing had changed here except that a slip of white paper had been inserted under her door and glimmered white on the rug. "Henry!" she whispered in relief and picked it up, went to her window to check the lock, pulled the curtains and then unfolded the slip of paper.

But it was not from Henry, it was a message from the desk clerk on lined paper with the name of the hotel printed at the top. She read:

"9:02 Mr. Remsee fone. You lost pkge in his ownership. He bid you

stop before ." The clerk had written *before tiring* but she judged the word was meant to be *retiring*. She read it a second time, frowning. What on earth did it mean? It seemed hours since she had seen Colin Ramsey, and with her mind on Henry it was difficult to think what package she could have left behind when she visited Colin that afternoon. She tried to remember what she'd carried with her to Ramsey Studios but aside from the signet ring, which belonged to Colin, there had been only her purse. Lost package! She'd lost nothing today.

Nothing except a defecting counteragent, she thought in horror, and forgetting Henry she snatched up her purse and fled the room, almost overturning several people on the stairs in her haste to reach the street and find a taxi.

CHAPTER 6

BY NIGHT, ZIKZAK ALLEY LOOKED DESOLATE AND SINISTER, ITS buildings ghost-haunted. No light at all came from number twenty-three. A little worldlier now, however, Mrs. Pollifax walked down the narrow drive to the courtyard and was relieved to see thin stripes of light showing through the shutters of the kitchen window. She knocked on the door and it was opened at once by Colin. "What lost package?" demanded Mrs. Pollifax breathlessly.

Colin held the door wide and beckoned her in. "I say—I do hope they didn't give you a hard time!"

"Who?" she said, blinking at him.

"The police."

"You *saw*?" she flung at him accusingly. "You *knew* I was picked up by the police and you left? Just *left*?"

He was bolting the door behind him. "Of course," he said. "I was afraid you'd head for the jeep and talk to me. In that case the police would have headed for the jeep too, and would have noticed your friend—that woman who was sitting with you in the hotel window."

Mrs. Pollifax stared at him incredulously.

"I had her hidden in the back seat of the jeep, covered with a sheepskin," he explained calmly. "She was in a spot of trouble, wasn't she? Running out like that, looking like death itself—"

Appalled, Mrs. Pollifax stared at him. "You mean she was in your jeep when you drove *away*?"

He said patiently, "It's what I've been trying to tell you, yes. She came flying out, I leaned over and opened the door, said, 'Hop in—I'm Mrs. Pollifax's driver' or some such words. She fell in, I dropped the robe over her and that was that. A few seconds later the policeman followed and asked me if I'd seen a woman run from the hotel. I pointed

out that I couldn't possibly see the entrance from where I was sitting without turning my head, but that no one had run up the street *past* me. She he went the other way."

Mrs. Pollifax faltered, "But then—what did you do with her?"

He looked surprised. "Nothing at all—she's here. She's still in the jeep."

"Still in the jeep!"

"I couldn't rouse her so I simply locked the garage and left her there, and—what's the matter?"

Mrs. Pollifax had sat down very suddenly in the nearest chair. "You mean she's here? In that garage in back? In your jeep?"

Puzzled, Colin said, "Yes, of course. She *is* your friend, isn't she? I saw you together in the lobby and —"

Mrs. Pollifax began to laugh, she couldn't help herself. The laugh was a mixture of relief and hysteria but if it had a disquieting effect on Colin it was extremely therapeutic for her. As she wiped her eyes and blew her nose she said, "I simply can't thank you enough, Colin."

"Yes you can—you can tell me what the hell this is all about," he said, sitting down and looking at her sternly.

"About?" she echoed.

"That woman is no tourist. She needs blood transfusions at a hospital, not shish kabob at Pierre Loti's. What did the police want of you?"

"My passport," said Mrs. Pollifax sadly.

"Passport! You mean they took it away from you?"

"Yes, but only until they've investigated me."

He looked appalled. "But good heavens, you can't do anything without a passport—this isn't America, you know. You can't even change hotels without your passport!" He stared at her incredulously. "Doesn't the seriousness of this seep through to you at all? What on earth do the police think you've done? What reason did they give for taking your passport?"

Mrs. Pollifax sighed—she was beginning to feel very tired. "They seem to feel that I might have come to Istanbul to meet a notorious Communist agent."

His jaw dropped. "They *what*? *You*?"

"Yes," she said, and stood up. "Now I really must speak to my friend—speak to her at once—and then I'll remove her as soon as possible. I don't want to involve you—"

"Involve me?" he said angrily. "I'm already involved. What I'm trying to discover is what I'm involved *in*. You do know you're being followed, don't you?"

"You keep noticing things," she said with a sigh.

"Of course. I saw that chap walking up and down the alley when you were here this afternoon, but when I left you at the door of your hotel damned if he didn't follow you directly inside, and for all I know he's followed you here again, and is outside right now."

Mrs. Pollifax brightened. "Oh I do hope so," she said eagerly. "I tried to find him only half an hour ago at the hotel but I couldn't. That's Henry."

Colin looked taken aback. "Henry," he repeated blankly. "You know him then. Look here, who the devil are you? Or to put it more succinctly, *what* are you?"

She said sympathetically, "I'm Emily Pollifax, truly I am. I live in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and I'm an American citizen and I have two grown children and three grandchildren, and that's more than the Turkish police believe at this moment but it's absolutely true."

He put his hand to his head. "All right. Oddly enough I believe you, although I can't think of any *logical* reason why I do. But why did you come to Istanbul then?"

"To meet a notorious Communist agent," she told him cheerfully. "Now do please show me where the jeep is."

"You insist on being facetious," he told her bitterly. He removed a key from the shelf over the sink, opened the door for her and closed it behind them both. "This way," he said, and they walked in silence across the courtyard. A bright moon had turned the whitewashed buildings into ghost-silver and the bougainvillea threw jagged shadows over the cobbles. The sounds of the city were muted in this enclosure. Colin unlocked the door to the office and beckoned her inside. "She's in here," he said, and opened still another door and turned on the lights with a flick of his hand.

Mrs. Pollifax entered a double garage, at the moment containing only the jeep, a pile of abandoned tires and an orange crate. A shapeless bundle in the rear of the jeep stirred and lifted a head, shedding a sheepskin rug, and Magda Ferenci-Sabo blinked at the sudden light.

"Good evening," said Mrs. Pollifax amiably. "It seems that Mr. Ramsey has reunited us!"

Magda's glance moved from Mrs. Pollifax to Colin. "He is also—?"

Mrs. Pollifax sighed. "No, he is not," and for a moment both of them looked dubiously at Colin, who gazed stolidly back at them. "Colin," she said, "I wonder if you would mind—"

"No," he said crossly.

Mrs. Pollifax regarded him with interest. "You won't allow us a few minutes—?"

"No."

"What a difficult young man," said Magda.

Mrs. Pollifax smiled. "Yes, but he hid you from the police, this is his jeep you're occupying and this is his uncle's garage. Now we must think how to get you out of here. You *are* the woman I was sent to meet, aren't you?"

The woman looked at Colin. "It's better not to mention names, but there was a cable—"

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "Yes, it was shown to me. Can you quote it?"

"I think so." Magda closed her eyes. "It read: Arrived six P.M., have enjoyed eight hours Oteli Itep, wish " She opened her eyes. "If you were shown it perhaps you would be so kind as to complete it so that I too can be sure."

"Of course," said Mrs. Pollifax. "Wish you could join me why not send Red Queen or Black Jack before Friday."

"Look here," said Colin, regarding them uneasily.

"And the identity of Red Queen?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"I say," broke in Colin again, looking increasingly alarmed.

"Red Queen was Agatha Simms. I thought at first you might be she but you're not. For my benefit—because you know so much about it—can you identify Black Jack?" asked Magda, and Mrs. Pollifax complied by bending over her and whispering the name of Carstairs. Magda nodded. "We understand each other -good. Now you must help me get to Yozgat, please."

Mrs. Pollifax looked at her blankly. "I beg your pardon?"

"Yozgat."

"Who on earth is Yozgat?"

Colin said testily, "It's a town, a Turkish town off beyond Ankara somewhere."

Mrs. Pollifax stared at Magda in astonishment. "But that's out of the question. I'm carrying a passport for you, all very legal and made out in the name of Alice Dexter White, and sufficient funds for you to get to America. You're to leave Turkey at once—and really you can, I think, in spite of all the furor because I've thought about it, and if I dye your hair and bring you some fashionable American clothes "

A strangled gasp came from Colin but they paid it no attention. Magda sat up and said flatly, "I cannot leave this country yet, not even if it costs me my life."

"But you must," cried Mrs. Pollifax. "The police are looking for you—"

"I know, I know," admitted Magda, "and so are the Russians and the Bulgarians—"

An outright groan issued from Colin.

"—not to mention the people who kidnapped me from the British consulate and who are far more dangerous than any police." She edged her feet over the seat and dangled them. "But my life is of no significance at all if I leave without what I brought with me, and I *must* get to Yozgat. What is the trouble?" she asked of Colin, turning toward him. "Are you ill?"

He was sitting on the orange crate staring at them in open-mouthed horror. "My God," he gasped, "I'm harboring a bloody pair of spies! The two of you!"

"You insisted on listening," Mrs. Pollifax reminded him patiently.

"But she's that woman everybody's looking for!" He looked haggard. "And she's sitting right here in my uncle's garage!"

"Yes, she is," admitted Mrs. Pollifax, "but really I'm trying very hard to think of where to take her, I *don't* want to involve you in this, you've already been so very kind —"

"Kind!" he said in a stricken voice. "Kind! You seemed like such a nice elderly lady!" He stopped, appalled. "I say, I'm terribly sorry, I didn't mean that the way it sounded." He looked even more appalled to discover himself apologizing. "Oh, hang it all," he said fiercely, and turning to Magda, "Do you know of somewhere to go?"

"Yes, to Yozgat," she said firmly.

"Magda—"

She turned to Mrs. Pollifax impatiently. "Why do you think they not kill me?" she demanded. "They want what I brought with me; I cross the Bulgarian frontier –do not ask me how– and I know I am followed so I separate myself from what I brought with me and I go instead to Istanbul for help. Now I must get to Yozgat, to recover what I bring. Do you not understand that—" She stopped uncertainly. "I hear someone."

"It must be Henry," said Mrs. Pollifax and turned toward the door expectantly.

But it was not Henry. Two square-shouldered bulky young men in trenchcoats stood in the door regarding them and the interior of the garage with interest. Magda caught her breath sharply. Mrs. Pollifax pulled herself together and said in a steady voice, "And who are you?"

The bulkier of the two men casually pulled a gun from his pocket.

"Police?" said Colin hopefully.

"I don't think so," Mrs. Pollifax told him regretfully.

Magda sighed. "Stefan and Otto, I grow tired with you. For what do you want to follow an old woman like me, hmm?"

Stefan grinned; it was a joke he appeared to appreciate and in such a stolid Slavic face his mirth was almost indecent. "We do not follow you –it is this one leads us here." He pointed at Mrs. Pollifax, who

stared at him uncomprehendingly. "Who would have guessed the plump American partridge would know the wily Russian fox?" As he spoke his eyes continued to roam over the garage, mercilessly assessing the possibilities of the situation. Now he moved to Colin. "You will give the key to the jeep, please," he said, and extended his left hand, palm up, to Colin. Behind him his friend Otto also pulled out a gun.

"I say—it's not your jeep," Colin said indignantly. "It's not even mine, and you've absolutely no right—"

"The key," said Stefan, pressing the gun into Colin's stomach. "Otto, open the garage doors, and quickly."

Reluctantly, glaringly, Colin fumbled in his pocket and brought out a key that he placed in the palm of the man's hand. "You are wise," said Stefan. "Stay wise and you will live." Carefully he backed up until he reached the jeep, where Madame Ferenci-Sabo had begun making feeble attempts to climb out. With one arm he shoved her down. "Sit! Did you really think we wanted only a jeep?" he said mockingly. He opened the door and slid into the front seat, his head still turned to watch them. Only when the garage doors stood wide open did he insert the key into the ignition. Over his shoulder he called, "Don't forget our little souvenir, Otto!" To Mrs. Pollifax he said with a smile, "We do not wish to leave you emptyhanded. That would be quite unfair. We are like your pack rat, preferring always to leave something behind."

Mrs. Pollifax turned in alarm and looked toward the courtyard. From the shadow of the bougainvillea along the left wall Otto was dragging an inert and heavy bundle. She heard Colin, near the door, say, "Good God!" and she guessed by his whitened face that the burden Otto wrestled with was human. She watched in horror as Otto dragged a man into the garage; he placed the man at Mrs. Pollifax's feet and turned him over, and Mrs. Pollifax found herself staring into the vacant, unseeing eyes of Henry Miles. Dimly she heard Colin say, "You brutes," but his voice sounded miles away. She stared stupidly down at Henry, tears filling her eyes as she saw the small round bullet hole in his shirt. Henry had winked at her in the London air terminal, Henry had valiantly followed her since her arrival and now he was dead at her feet.

She looked up as the engine of the jeep roared into life; Stefan thrust the gears into reverse and she jumped back as the car virtually catapulted from the garage carrying a Magda who sat with eyes closed, her face unbelievably white. The jeep neatly turned around in the courtyard, Otto leaped in beside Magda, and the car shot up the driveway and disappeared.

"At least the petrol tank's almost empty," Colin said in a choked voice.

Mrs. Pollifax sank down beside Henry and looked into his face. "He's dead," she said in a trembling voice, and placed her hand over his heart but she could not change him. She felt a million years old and deeply shocked. It had all happened so quickly. Four minutes earlier there had been only the three of them here, talking about Yozgat. Now the jeep was gone, Henry lay dead at her feet and Magda Ferenci-Sabo had vanished a second time. Mrs. Pollifax looked across the empty garage at Colin. He was standing in the same spot, his mouth a little open in astonishment, his hand still extended to give the man the key. He closed his mouth now with a snap. "Do you know him?" he asked.

"It's Henry."

He nodded dumbly. "It was like a raid," he said, and then, blinking, "They've taken your friend."

"Yes. And killed Henry." Neither of them were sensibly communicating yet.

"And stolen my uncle's jeep." His lips thinned and he said peevishly, "Damn it, I absolutely loathe being pushed around." He walked to her side and leaned over Henry. "He's really dead?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do with him?"

It was an interesting question, delivered with the detachment born of shock, but it served to bring Mrs. Pollifax to her senses, which had been badly jarred. "Why I don't know," she said in astonishment, and at once understood that Henry dead could prove an almost insurmountable embarrassment, which was undoubtedly why Stefan had presented him to them. "Good heavens!" she gasped, and stood up.

"We ought to have followed them," Colin said. "There's still the van in the other garage but now it's too late. If they go far they're bound to empty the tank, there was less than five miles' worth left. We ought to have followed them. We can't keep Henry here," he added.

"No, we can't," said Mrs. Pollifax.

"Because you don't have a passport," he said, as if this explained everything.

She nodded. "I realize that. But I believe I know what to do with Henry. It's just struck me. I can take him to Dr. Belleaux."

"Who?"

"I was given the name of a man a retired professor—to contact in an emergency."

"But with a *body*?"

Mrs. Pollifax thought about this. "I daresay it's unorthodox," she admitted, "but if he's equipped to handle emergencies can you think of any

graver emergency than being presented with the body of a man who's been murdered? We have to consider your uncle, too; this is his garage."

"Yes," Colin said, nodding solemnly.

"Also," continued Mrs. Pollifax feverishly, "what else can we do with Henry? Stefan need only make one anonymous phone call to the police and I shall never get my passport back. And I have Dr. Belleaux's address right here in my purse. He's highly respected by the Turkish government—"

"Do you mean Dr. Guillaume Belleaux?" said Colin in surprise.

"Yes, do you know him?"

"I've heard of him. Everyone has."

"Well, I hadn't. But don't you see, he can vouch for me to the Turkish police! Of course we can't tell the police about Magda, but this time there's your jeep, with a registration number and a traceable license, and I can certainly describe to the police the two men who stole it. With this information the police may very well find both the jeep and the men by morning, and I shall have a clue as to where Magda may be!"

"Let's go then," Colin said, nodding. "The van's in the other garage. I'll back it up and we can put—uh—Henry inside." He disappeared through the door to the office and she heard an engine starting, garage doors open, and then a cumbersome van backed into the courtyard and Colin leaped out. "I think I'll turn the lights out for this," he said nervously and pulled the switch, leaving moonlight their only illumination. "You take his feet, will you? I'll take his shoulders."

Clumsily, slowly, they carried Henry to the van and inserted him into it. This proved extremely difficult because the van's rear doors had been welded closed—to gain more space inside, Colin explained breathlessly—and Henry had to be lifted up to the high cab of the van. Then it proved impossible to lift him between the two seats and they were forced to let him remain sprawled between the seats in a rather abandoned, drunken pose.

"I hope Henry doesn't mind," Mrs. Pollifax said breathlessly. "I mean his spirit, or whatever lingers behind."

"I suppose he's a spy, too," Colin said.

"Probably," said Mrs. Pollifax with a sigh, "although he was here only to keep an eye on me, to look after me, so to speak. Oh, if only I could have warned him!"

The van was moving ponderously up the driveway and now turned down Zikzak alley. "You said you have Dr. Belleaux's address?" asked Colin.

She disentangled it from the other papers in her purse and handed it to him. "The bottom one is the home address," she pointed out.

He glanced at it, memorized it and handed it back to her. "That's in the Taksim area. At this hour it won't take long. I know that street very posh." He glanced down at Henry briefly. "Did you know him well?"

"No," said Mrs. Pollifax. "I was introduced to him in Washington just before I boarded the plane. But in London he winked at me, and he was one of the men who kept staring in fascination at my seat companion why that was your sister," she recalled in surprise.

"He liked Mia," Colin said soberly, and Mrs. Pollifax realized that they were giving Henry the nearest thing to a wake possible.

They lapsed into silence, each of them involved in their own thoughts as the van negotiated the dark streets. Doubtless Colin was thinking of his uncle's jeep—another disaster for him, she mused while she tried not to think of what might be happening to Magda, or what had already happened to Henry. It must have been his murder that she had interrupted when she entered his room at the Oteli Itep to warn him. She recalled the curtains fluttering at the balcony window and shivered: his body must have lain behind those curtains. It was rather obvious now that Stefan had also hidden behind those curtains, and heard her call to Henry and then she had led the murderers straight to Magda. *I should never have gone to Henry's room*, she thought sadly. *Mr. Carstairs warned me no, ordered me to have no contact with him at all. How could I have forgotten? One soft-hearted moment and I betray Magda.*

And Magda, she remembered, had been her assignment. Not Henry. In retrospect all kinds of ingenious little ideas came to her: she could have sent the manager's son to room 214 carrying the guide book as well as a note for Henry, whom she had believed to be alive then. Or she could have slipped an anonymous warning under his door and fled. But no, she had gone instead to his room and entered, calling out his name, and now his enemies knew that Emily Pollifax, too, was not what she appeared to be.

They were passing over the Galata Bridge now, and the lights of moving tugs and boats slashed the glistening inky water with long ribbons of gold. Even at midnight the bridge was filled with traffic: mules, trucks and donkeys bearing fruits and vegetables to the markets and merchandise to the bazaars. Pale moonlight etched out the silhouette of the mosque at the foot of the bridge and touched each passerby with a highlight of silver. Mrs. Pollifax sighed and forced herself back to the moment, and to arranging explanations for the Dr. Belleaux whom she would presently meet. "How is it that you've heard of Dr. Belleaux?" she asked Colin. "Is he really that well-known?"

"To live in Istanbul is to hear of him," he said. "The police consult him on murders he writes and lectures about criminology, you know

and the archaeologists consult him on bones, that sort of thing. He's quite lionized as an author and scholar. Goes to all the 'in' parties."

"What does he look like?"

"My impression is that he's fiftyish, or early sixtyish, with a pointed white goatee. Rather thin, talkative, elegant."

"I do hope he's of a practical nature."

"You mean practical enough to dispose of a body?" commented Colin dryly. "Ah, here's the street, I told you it was an impressive one."

"Indeed yes," she said, looking out upon well-spaced villas surrounded by charming gardens. The homes on the street were dark except for one in the center of the block that blazed with light. It was at this house that Colin applied the brakes. "You're in luck," he said. "Dr. Belleaux is not only up but from the look of all the cars parked here he's giving a party as well –and they've not left much space to get through, damn it." He leaned out and swore, maneuvered the van through the line of cars, turned around and came back, cutting the ignition and the lights. "Here we are," he said. "What do you plan to do?"

"I'd not expected a party," she said. "I shall have to ask to speak privately to Dr. Belleaux. I think I shall tell them at the door I'm from the American embassy—is there one?"

"They're all consulates here."

"All right, then I'm from the American consulate. That will do until I can get Dr. Belleaux aside and explain myself and *my* to explain Henry."

"Would you rather I pull into the drive?" he asked. "A bit awkward unloading in the front."

"Later I want to be able to find you again," Mrs. Pollifax confessed. "This may take a little time. Would you care to come too?" She was growing rather attached to Colin, she realized.

"I don't feel I should leave Henry, do you? If anyone walked past and happened to glance in –"

His voice trailed off as a car rattled up the avenue, sputtering and backfiring, to turn into Dr. Belleaux's driveway a few feet away from them. At the crest of the drive the car shuddered to a halt, a man jumped from the rear seat and gave it a push it was a jeep and then leaped in as the car coasted down the driveway to the rear.

Mrs. Pollifax drew in her breath sharply. "Colin," she said incredulously. "Colin—"

"I saw it," he said in a stunned voice.

"I'm not losing my mind?"

"No," he said, and then, quickly and incoherently, "Damn it, no. Even

the petrol I told you the tank was almost empty and you saw him pushing it. Damn it, that was my jeep!"

"But here?" whispered Mrs. Pollifax. *"Here?"*

"It was Otto—I swear it who jumped out and gave it a push," he said. "And that must have been your friend slumped in the back. Are you coming?" he demanded. He opened the door and jumped to the pavement.

"I certainly am," she said fervently. She could not imagine what kind of mix-up she had stumbled into. There had to be some reasonable explanation, but it would have to be delivered to her at a more appropriate moment. Stefan and Otto simply *couldn't* be working for Carstairs, too; not when Magda had virtually identified the two of them as her abductors. And they had killed Henry. But why were they *here*?

"Just a minute," said Colin, and reached into the compartment of the van to extract two lethal-looking guns. "Don't expect them to fire, they're made of wood," he whispered. "They're props Uncle Hu made for a short subject on Ataturk."

"But I'm delighted he did," she told him.

Props in hand they hurried down the driveway, moving from shadow to shadow until they came to the corner of the house. But already it was too late. Mrs. Pollifax had hoped they might arrive in the rear to find the jeep's motor still running, Stefan and Otto off guard and Magda still accessible but the jeep had been abandoned. The back door to the house stood wide open, the screen door still swinging gently, but although a great deal of light and noise came from the building there were no humans to be seen.

"Damn," said Colin. He looked intently at Mrs. Pollifax. "You're not going to knock and ask for Dr. Belleaux." He might have intended it as a question but it came out as a flat statement.

"No."

"Are you going to call the police?"

She said gently, "From what you've told me of Dr. Belleaux a number of the police are probably inside at his party. And I don't have a passport. No—I'm going to risk a look inside."

He looked shaken. "I say, that's rather dangerous."

She said steadily, "Perhaps it will be but I really don't know what else to do. As you may have guessed, I came to Istanbul only to meet and help Magda and she's in there, and I'm responsible."

He nodded. "Then I'm going in with you."

She looked at him. "Colin, I can't let you become any more involved, I really can't. I have to remind you that all I did was deliver a message from your sister this afternoon—"

"Yesterday afternoon by now—"

"—and you'd never seen me before in your life. This is going to be very illicit, I may get caught, and you've said yourself that you're a physical coward."

He said fiercely, "Of course I'm a coward but I absolutely loathe being pushed around I told you that and these men stole my uncle's jeep, dumped a dead man in our garage and kidnapped your friend. Now do let's stop talking of course I'm going with you!"

Mrs. Pollifax smiled faintly. "All right," and returned her glance to the house. It was a two-storied rectangle of pale stucco with blue shutters. She wondered if Stefan and Otto had gone upstairs or down to the basement but there were no clues. She tiptoed to the screen door and peered inside; directly opposite, scarcely five feet away, a back staircase rose steeply toward the top of the house. Her decision had been made for her: they would try the upstairs first. "Look," she whispered, pointing.

To the right lay a long kitchen, brightly lit but empty of people although she could hear the sound of running water from a distant corner. Mrs. Pollifax slowly opened the screen door, testing for squeaks. Nothing happened and she slipped inside and across to the staircase with Colin directly behind her. She did not pause until she was halfway up the stairs. Here the rising sounds of the party proved an irritant: it was a very large party and the murmur of voices rose and fell in waves, but if they concealed any sounds that she and Colin made they had the disadvantage of concealing approaching footsteps as well. She felt trapped in noises, all of them confusing; still, she could not remain exposed on this stairway for any length of time and so she rallied, brought out her absurd wooden pistol and moved to the top of the stairs.

Here she met a wide carpeted hallway containing six doors, all of them closed. On her right, at the far end, the hall terminated in a stairwell and the carpet overflowed the stairs like a waterfall of gold; it was from this end of the house that music and conversation rose almost deafeningly. Mrs. Pollifax headed in the opposite direction, on the supposition that these rooms were farthest removed from people, and people would be what Stefan and Otto must avoid if they were here, and the thought of their being here—of all places!—still baffled and shocked Mrs. Pollifax.

The first door they opened was a bedroom but except for ornate hangings and baroque furniture it was empty. The second door proved to be a linen closet. With some impatience Mrs. Pollifax threw open the door to the third room, only to be reminded that impatience bred carelessness, for this time she had opened the door to a bedroom containing

three people — the impact took her breath away — and in unison, also stunned, three people turned to stare at her.

It was as if she had abruptly cut the switch on an unwinding reel of film. Magda lay across a chaise lounge like a bundle that had been flung there, and Stefan, leaning over her, looked up in the act of withdrawing a hypodermic needle from her arm. Otto stood on guard a few feet from Mrs. Pollifax, his mouth open as he stared at her. He was the first to react: he moved so swiftly, so menacingly, that without a second to think about it Mrs. Pollifax lifted her right hand, flattened it as Lorvale had taught her, and dealt Otto a crisp karate chop to the side of his throat. He stared at her in astonishment and then his eyes closed and he sank slowly to the floor. Behind her Colin gasped, *"Mrs. Pollifax!"*

"Get his gun," said Mrs. Pollifax crisply.

Colin stooped and plucked it from the floor, pocketing his own wooden prop. Holding the live gun he gestured Stefan away from Magda. "Against the wall," he ordered, waving the gun with growing enthusiasm.

Mrs. Pollifax, her flowered hat only a little askew, went at once to Magda, who was trying to stand. "Can you walk?"

"I'm drugged," she said in an anguished voice. "Hurry!"

Mrs. Pollifax nodded, and, grasping her arm, led her to the door. Colin followed, walking backward with his gun pointed at Stefan. But Stefan refused to remain abjectly against the wall: he took one step and then another, following Colin with a nasty grin on his face.

"There's no lock on this door!" Colin said desperately, trying to slam it in Stefan's face.

Mrs. Pollifax glanced back over her shoulder. Magda had already begun to sag and it was doubtful that she would remain upright if Mrs. Pollifax withdrew her arm to help Colin. Obviously Stefan was determined to follow them; he knew the gun was loaded because it was Otto's, but he was not going to make it easy for Colin, who was so patently an amateur. To hesitate for long would risk their having to literally carry Magda out of the house in their arms. "If he comes too close, shoot him," she said calmly, and headed down the hall to the stairs.

But at the top of the rear staircase Mrs. Pollifax stopped in dismay, for the downstairs hall and entrance that had been deserted ten minutes ago was now aswarm with workers. The screen door through which they had entered was propped wide open. Buckets of ice were being carried in and empty trays wheeled out to a waiting truck. A heavy-set butler stood at the bottom of the stairs calling out orders and completely blocking the exit. He did not look as if he would give ground easily, or let them through unchallenged.

Mrs. Pollifax turned away. They had to get out of the house quickly, before Magda lost consciousness, and there was no alternative now but to use the main staircase. Propping up Magda she half-carried her to the stairwell, grasped the banister and began a step-by-step descent. They made a ludicrous procession, she thought, herself and Magda clinging together in the vanguard, followed by Colin walking backward and brandishing a pistol at Stefan, who continued to leer and follow three paces behind. As they descended Mrs. Pollifax could look down and see the massive oak door at the foot of the stairs. She knew that beyond, parked in the street, stood Colin's van; if they could just get through that door . . .

The piano playing came to a sudden halt. Slowly the murmur of voices subsided into startled silence and Mrs. Pollifax found herself in full view of Dr. Belleaux's party; she was in fact staring down into dozens of gaping faces. She supposed that two women on the stairs might have gone unnoticed but that the sight of Colin holding a gun made for a certain conspicuousness. Rather wearily — it had been a long and violent evening — Mrs. Pollifax lifted her wooden gun and addressed the sea of faces below her. In her most imperious voice she said, "I will shoot the first person who tries to stop us." It was a phrase culled from the late late movies but it was the best that she could manage under the circumstances.

Someone said, "Get Dr. Belleaux!"

Mrs. Pollifax reached the bottom of the stairs and pulled open the door, holding it wide. As Colin backed into her, stepping painfully on her ankle, she said in a low voice, "Take Magda and run."

He nodded and pressed the functioning gun into her hand. "Thanks — I couldn't possibly shoot it," he admitted.

"I can," she said calmly. "Just get her out, she's going under."

It was now Colin who bore the sagging Magda into the night and down the path, and Mrs. Pollifax who faced Stefan. "I am going to shoot the first person who walks through this door after I leave," she called out, only a little embarrassed by her clichés. To her left, from a corner of her eye, she saw several people move apart, and for just one moment she allowed her glance to leave Stefan: she looked into the livingroom and into the eyes of the party's host who had suddenly appeared. She thought, *Dr. Belleaux, I presume*, and then her glance swerved back to Stefan, she saw him coiled to jump at her and she fired the gun at the ceiling above him. Slamming the door behind her, she ran.

Colin was bundling Magda into the van across the street but unfortunately Henry was already there, which had led to difficulties. When Mrs. Pollifax reached the van Colin was starting up the engine with a

dead Henry at his elbow and an unconscious Magda in the passenger seat. "Jump in somewhere — anywhere," he cried in a harassed voice. "Try the floor or sit on Henry. Or Magda."

Mrs. Pollifax climbed in and fell across Magda just as the van began to move and a second before it raced down the street. "I'm heading for the ferry, I'm going to get you out of Istanbul right now, before all hell breaks loose," he said, and he turned on the van's lights as they reached the corner. "You can't go back to your hotel, and the first place Stefan will look for you is Ramsey Enterprises, and after that they'll begin watching the ferries and the airport. There's not a minute to lose; the ferries don't run as often at night."

"I'm a wanted citizen," Mrs. Pollifax said in a surprised voice.

Colin looked at her and grinned. "Well, look at the facts, Mrs. Pollifax," he suggested. "The police have your passport and will be looking for you, Stefan and Otto will be looking for you, you'll be wanted for burglarizing — not to mention kidnapping — and have you noticed the interesting passengers we've acquired? At the moment I can't think how to explain a dead man with a hole in his chest or a woman who's been heavily drugged."

Mrs. Pollifax looked at him. "Colin," she said accusingly, "you *enjoyed* it!"

"Good God, it was terrifying," he said. "What I am experiencing is the absolute relief at still being alive. Who would ever have believed we would get away with it! I say," he added, "shouldn't you do something about Henry before we reach the ferry?"

Mrs. Pollifax agreed; and as the van careened through the empty streets she alternately tugged and pulled Henry into the darkest shadows of the van.

CHAPTER 7

AT THE KABATAS LANDING STAGE THEY ENCOUNTERED THEIR FIRST stroke of luck: a ferry was being readied to leave its slip. Ropes and chains were being cast off, but the gates had not yet closed. With a flourish Colin drove the van onto the ferry; only one more car followed and the gates swung shut. "But there are telephones?" pointed out Mrs. Pollifax bleakly.

"There are telephones, yes. Keep your fingers crossed that no one will be waiting for us on the other side!"

As they crossed the Bosporus they undertook a frenzied and certainly bizarre housecleaning of the van's rear, which had been casually equipped for living purposes. Under Colin's tutelage they set up a battered old army cot and chained it to the wall, placed a still heavily drugged Magda on it and covered her with blanket. They rolled Henry under the one piece of built-in furniture in the van: a high work-bench which Colin explained was used for developing photographs, cooking meals on a sterno and even, in emergencies, as a bed. "Do you think the people at Dr. Belleaux's party saw the van clearly enough to describe it?" asked Mrs. Pollifax, covering Henry with a blanket, too.

"From the window anyone could have seen the shape of it," Colin said. "But the license or its color, no. It was too dark — the nearest light was far down the street. But you know they need only inquire what vehicles belong to Ramsey Enterprises to learn the registry number and description. There's the jeep, and this van, and then the second van that Uncle Hu's taken to Erzurum. Do you think Stefan overheard Magda insisting on going to Yozgat?"

Mrs. Pollifax said in a dismal voice, "Probably." She sighed. "It does seem the most wretched luck that Magda's drugged again and can't explain more. My orders were to get her out of Turkey quickly — to save

her life at any cost — and I don't *like* this Yozgat business. I've finally found her, and it would still be relatively simple to put her on a plane, whereas Yozgat—" Her voice trailed off uncertainly and she shook her head. "I don't even know where it is yet!"

"I don't mind dropping you off there," Colin said. "I've thought about it, you know. I can't go back to Istanbul until this blows over and I've decided to keep going and find Uncle Hu. He's the only person who can untangle all this—for me at least—and he should be starting back from Erzurum tomorrow morning."

"Colin—"

He smiled. "I know, I know, you hate to see me involved. It's purest chivalry, of course—I'm cursed with it. I was raised on King Arthur."

"I think that's rather charming," said Mrs. Pollifax thoughtfully, "but you're taking me on face value alone which alarms me."

"Rum, isn't it?" he said smiling, and shrugged. "I can't possibly explain it—call it a hunch or an instinct. Or put it this way: How can I possibly drop all this now and never know how it turns out? Good God, the thought appalls me. And do you realize that tonight — for the first time in my life — I've been involved in something I actually pulled off successfully? It's positively dazzling. In the meantime your friend Magda seems to attract the most unwholesome bunch of toughs I've ever seen, and I can't say very much for your other friend—I mean Dr. Belleaux, of course."

"I can't say very much for him, either," said Mrs. Pollifax with feeling. "I think that Mr. Carstairs would be extremely surprised by what we've seen tonight, too."

"Who?"

"Mr. Carstairs is the gentleman who—uh — arranged my coming here."

Colin said with a crooked smile, "To have sent you he must have a real sense of humor. There's the warning bell—come along to the front of the van, we're almost there."

"Oh," said Mrs. Pollifax in a hollow voice, turned off the flashlight and crept back into the passenger seat.

The ferry nudged its way into the slip, chains rattled, gates opened and engines warmed up. The cars ahead began to move, and Colin inched the van forward. Slowly they drove off the ferry and into the night: no police whistles shrilled, no one ran toward them shouting at them to halt. They had crossed the Bosporus and left the peninsula of Istanbul behind without incident. "Now where are we?" inquired Mrs. Pollifax and brought out her guide book.

"No need for that," said Colin. "This is Uskudar, formerly Chrysopo-

lis, and noted mainly as a suburb and for its enormous Buyuk Mezaristan, or cemetery."

"Cemetery!" exclaimed Mrs. Pollifax thoughtfully.

Colin looked at her. "You can't possibly—"

"But we must find somewhere appropriate to leave Henry."

He groaned. "You look so extremely respectable, you know."

"I have a flexible mind I believe it's one of the advantages of growing old," she explained. "I find youth quite rigid at times. Why *not* a cemetery?"

Colin sighed. "I daresay there's a certain logic there. You're not uh—thinking of burying him as well?"

"That would be illegal," she told him reproachfully, "and scarcely kind to Henry."

"Sorry," he said. He peered out at a sign, and nodded. "This is the avenue—I think we're driving alongside the cemetery now. Watch for an entrance, will you?"

Several moments later they left the world of trams, lights and occasional automobiles and entered a subterranean night world of awesome silence. "This is the cemetery?" faltered Mrs. Pollifax.

"It's a cypress grove, quite huge. There's a sultan buried in the old part. I'd call the new part spooky enough."

"But what curious headstones!"

"They're Moslem, of course. The steles with knobs on the top represent women, the ones with turbans are men. Then there are variations - I've forgotten them for priests and those who've gone to Mecca."

The van bumped to a jarring halt and he cut the motor. At once the silence was filled with an overwhelming drone of chirping grasshoppers and shrilling cicadas; the volume was incredible, as if they had entered a jungle. The headlights picked out tangles of sinister dark undergrowth and the silhouette of hundreds of headstones leaning in every conceivable direction. The moon, dimmer now and trailing clouds behind it, sailed over the forsaken scene and added a ghostly pallor to the tombs. When an owl hooted mournfully Mrs. Pollifax jumped.

"Well," said Colin, and flicked off the headlights.

"I suppose you had to turn off the lights?" said Mrs. Pollifax as both darkness and insect noises moved in on them.

"I really don't think we're supposed to be here," Colin pointed out reasonably.

"I can't think why not," she said bravely, and climbed down from her seat.

Clumsily, laboriously, they carried Henry from his hiding place and

lifted him down to the damp grass. "Where do you want him?" asked Colin.

Mrs. Pollifax ignored the irony in his voice. "Over by that larger stone, I think. We want him to be noticed soon but not immediately. Do you think those horrid men took his identification?"

"Probably," gasped Colin as they carried Henry across a path that felt like a brook bed, up a small slope and to the larger, paler headstone that had caught Mrs. Pollifax's eye. "Don't show a light!" he said sharply.

"I'm writing his name and the name of his hotel on a slip of paper," she explained. "There! Henry Miles, care of Oteli Itep." She leaned over and tucked it into the pocket of his dark jacket. "I should like someone to do as much for me," she said firmly. She stood a moment looking into the eerie black shapes of gnarled tree trunks, creeping shrubbery and mooncast shadows. "He was a very nice man," she said at last. "Now, do let's leave."

"What did you do—roll `im?" said a deep, lazy, amused voice from the darkness.

Mrs. Pollifax turned and saw a shadow detach itself from the darkness of the tomb. A giant of a man arose, stretched himself calmly, yawned and strolled nonchalantly toward them. In the dim light he looked seven feet tall but this was a trick of shadows—Colin turned on the flashlight, and he shrank to a more reasonable six feet. His face was swarthy, with dirty scraggly hair and a stubble of a beard. He wore filthy sailors' pants, a jacket that had once been white, a frayed turtle-neck sweater. His feet were shod in a pair of old sneakers with a hole in each toe.

Colin said bravely, "Who the devil are you, and what are you doing behind that gravestone?"

"Sleeping," said the man, looking down at them. "Til you drove in and woke me up." He put his hands on his hips and surveyed Mrs. Pollifax with interest, his eyes moving appreciatively over the flowered hat, lingering on her face, then smiling as they took in the navy blue suit, white blouse and shoes. He shook his head. "Now I seen everything!" He dropped to the ground and peered at Henry. "He's dead," he said. "You shoot him?"

"No."

"Then what the hell."

"Someone else shot him," Colin said crossly.

"We didn't know what else to do with him," explained Mrs. Pollifax. "Since we just happened to be passing by -why are you here?" she asked sternly.

"That's my business." He stood up and looked at them. "A couple of tourists dropping off a guy with a bullet hole in his chest!" He shook his head. "Now wouldn't the police like to hear about that?"

Mrs. Pollifax stiffened. "Nonsense. I very much doubt that you can afford to talk to the police."

He laughed; his guffaw threatened to awaken even the dead. "You got a suspicious mind. Okay, so I'm sleeping in a graveyard. So I'm broke. So you got a corpse, it makes us even. You also got a truck and you're gonna drive it out of here. I need to get out of here. I had it in mind we might make a deal." His voice caressed the last word. "Wotthehell, how about it? I'll take a lift if you're going in the right direction."

"Which direction is that?" asked Colin cautiously.

Cunningly the man replied, "Which direction you heading?"

Mrs. Pollifax realized that she wasn't certain of this herself. "How *do* we proceed?" she asked.

"Toward Ankara."

"Perfect!" said their new companion, beaming at them. "Got a friend there that owes me money."

"Have you a passport?"

"Of a sort."

"What's your name?"

"Sandor's enough. Just Sandor."

"Greek?"

"Of a sort."

"A sailor?"

The man was clearly laughing at them now. "Of a sort."

"Can you drive?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"I can drive."

Mrs. Pollifax exchanged glances with Colin. "An unholy alliance," commented Colin.

"Sheerest blackmail, of course," said Mrs. Pollifax cheerfully.

"But mutual," pointed out Colin with a faint smile. "All right, Sandor, we'll give you a lift."

"Of course," he said. "But on a condition."

Mrs. Pollifax stiffened. "Oh?"

"No monkey business—no stops. I don't want no welcoming committees in Ankara."

Mrs. Pollifax smiled. "That uh fits our plans quite well," she conceded graciously. "You know a way to Ankara that avoids—uh—welcoming committees?"

"Know the city like the back of my hand!"

"A veritable jewel," she murmured.

As they walked back to the van Colin said in a low voice, "Of course you realize he's wanted by the police."

"Then he's in good company," she pointed out in a kind voice. "What would you guess his crime to be?"

"Smuggling's big along the coast, and if he's been a sailor he's probably been involved in smuggling. Opium, probably."

"Opium," repeated Mrs. Pollifax, and smiled. "So now we have joined the underworld! How very surprising life can be . . . !"

CHAPTER 8

THEY DROVE ALONG NIBBLING AT THE GRAPES WITH WHICH SANdor had equipped himself for his night in the graveyard. Following his initial shock at discovering they already had a passenger—"She dead, too?" he had asked with professional interest Sandor announced that he was going to sleep before he did any driving. "But I'll know if you stop," he said, drawing a serviceable gun from a pocket. "I'll sleep on the floor. Any monkey tricks and I'll shoot."

"Why didn't you show your gun earlier?" asked Mrs. Pollifax curiously.

His glance was withering; obviously he felt that his wits and his tongue were sufficient for gullible foreigners. "Did I need to?" he asked with a shrug. "Now, drive." Whereupon he lay down on the floor of the van, curled up and began snoring.

The moon that had perversely haunted them hours earlier now disappeared just when it would have been the most appreciated, and to further depress Mrs. Pollifax the road to Izmit was bumpy. At first the Bay of Kadiköy cheered her with its cluster of lights, and later there were sustaining glimpses of the Sea of Marmora but presently a light rain began to fall, blurring all the lights and with it any hope of sightseeing. Mrs. Pollifax's thoughts darkened equally: she had neither slept nor eaten anything of substance since her arrival in Istanbul and she was beginning to feel the lack of both: lemonade and grapes served only as an appetizer for a dinner that moved increasingly out of reach. She was also beginning to feel the irregularity of her situation: having never in her life received so much as a parking ticket she was under suspicion by the police in this supposedly friendly country, and presently she might even become the subject of a nationwide alarm. She had arrived in this country with Henry, and Henry was dead. There was no one at all to whom

she could appeal — certainly not to Dr. Belleaux now — and her companions in exile were a young British misfit and a disreputable blackmailer acquired in a cemetery.

It was difficult to figure out just how it had all happened. *Perhaps I'm too flexible*, she thought, and turned to scrutinize Colin beside her. She was not a fool. There were high stakes involved in this assignment, and many crosscurrents which she would probably never know about. It had already occurred to her that Mia Ramsey could have been artfully placed on the plane beside her to girlishly suggest looking up Colin. But there had been no certainty that Mrs. Pollifax would contact Colin at all, and several hours later it was Colin who had saved Magda by concealing her from the police. If he were part of a vast and sinister scheme it was doubtful that he would have telephoned and left a message asking Mrs. Pollifax to retrieve her lost friend; Magda would instead have disappeared forever. No, she had to regard Colin as a small miracle.

The van's headlights picked out pretty little suburban villas and strange place names: Kiziltoprak, Goztepe, Caddebostani Erenkoy, Saudiye, Bostanci. At a town called Maltepe the road met the sea again and followed it on to the seaside port of Kartal. To keep Colin awake Mrs. Pollifax read the road directions from the small guide book she had purchased in London. When this palled she read from the same book brief histories of the Ottoman and then the Seljuk Empires until a listless Colin complained that Sandor's snoring was more stimulating than ancient history. They then argued whether, once past Izmit, they should drive to Ankara by way of Bolu or Beyzapari.

"Which is the route people usually prefer?" she asked.

"Bolu. The road's excellent."

"Then I think we should go by way of Beyzapari."

They were still arguing this when they reached Izmit at half-past three in the morning. As they crossed the railroad tracks to leave the town they saw the first brightening of the horizon in the east, and seeing it Colin nodded. "All right, Beyzapari. The thought of getting to Ankara quickly is very tempting—after all, it's 292 miles and we've gone only sixty—but if dawn's coming, and the police will be looking for the van, then I concede we might not get to Ankara at all if we go by Bolu. By the way, what exactly do you expect—being an experienced undercover agent," he added dryly.

"I am not an undercover agent," said Mrs. Pollifax tartly. "I'm a courier. As to what I expect I would say just about anything, but that's because of Dr. Belleaux, you see."

Colin said wryly, "You've not yet found that rational explanation for Magda's being carried off to *his* house?"

"No I haven't," she said frankly, "and the really frightening part of it all is that he's a man whom everyone trusts. Carstairs told me he enjoys the confidence of the Turkish and American governments and you've described him as being a consultant to the police here and enjoying *everyone's* confidence. I seriously doubt that Carstairs would even remotely consider Dr. Belleaux's being involved in any treachery."

Colin said dryly, "Which leaves us the only two people who think otherwise? Damn it, that's a horrible thought!"

"Yes it is," said Mrs. Pollifax, and shivered. "But no matter how kind we try to be to Dr. Belleaux there's no getting around the fact that while he gives parties in his downstairs livingroom there are two chaps upstairs drugging a defenseless woman."

"Definitely a double standard there," agreed Colin.

She nodded. "His reputation makes it so patently unfair! There's no way to fight him—except to run, and I'm not sure that running is sensible, either, since it leaves him with an absolutely free hand. Just think of the possibilities open to him!"

"It's better you don't," Colin said gently.

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. He was quite right: they would be rendered helpless, like the tiger in a tiger hunt, with the police and Dr. Belleaux—separately or even together—beating the bushes in a steadily diminishing circle until they were isolated and then flushed out. "At least I have Magda," she said, but since she did not have the slightest idea of what to do with Magda, or how to get her safely out of the country before the police found them, this was not essentially comforting.

"Could you get word to your friend in Washington?" Colin asked.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I was given strict orders not to. I was also given strict orders never to contact Henry; but then I did, you see, in order to warn him he was being followed, and you know what a monstrous mistake that was. I led Stefan straight back to Magda. A cable to Mr. Carstairs might do the same thing. Do you need to show a passport to send a cable?"

"Probably. I have mine with me but of course by the time we get to Ankara the police may very well be looking for me, too."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pollifax in a depressed voice, and resumed staring out of the window.

Beyond Izmit the road dipped down to Geyve and then wound up again through hills covered with fields of wheat and tobacco. Dawn found them on a high plateau beyond Goynuk, and then they reached a pass and coasted down into a plain. Beyond the town of Nallihan Colin suddenly pulled the van off to one side of the road and braked to a stop. "We've gone nearly a hundred and sixty miles and I'm tired," he said,

mopping his forehead with his sleeve. "Sandor's going to have to pay his way now. Sandor," he called. "It's morning—half-past seven and your turn to drive."

"What the hell," said Sandor, making a great deal of noise yawning. "This lady back here is staring at me," he complained. "Is there breakfast?"

"There's a camp stove somewhere," said Colin, "and the water jug is full, I filled it myself—Uncle Hu is always very fussy about that. And I believe there are bouillon cubes, dusty but soluble."

"But that's wonderful," said Mrs. Pollifax with feeling. She crawled back to Magda who was staring at the roof of the van with a puzzled expression. Seeing Mrs. Pollifax she said in a weak voice that bore a trace of irony, "Where am I now?"

"It's a little difficult to explain."

"Who was that man who snores so dreadfully?"

"That's even more difficult to explain. How are you feeling?"

"Weak and very thirsty. I have been drugged again?"

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "It might be wise for you to get some fresh air now. It's very hot back here. Colin is making broth for you."

"Colin! That funny young man is still here?"

"The situation is extremely fluid and unconventional," Mrs. Pollifax told her, "but we *are* moving in the direction of Yozgat." She helped her to her feet, and out of the van to the roadside where Colin had set up his sterno.

Colin was saying, "Presently we'll be crossing the Anatolian plain and there will be even more sun, wind and dust." The water he was nursing came to a boil, he stirred bouillon into it and carefully divided it among four battered tin mugs. "Here you are," he said.

Never had Mrs. Pollifax tasted anything kinder to her palate: at first she rolled the broth on her tongue, savoring its wetness, and then she drank it greedily. "Purest nectar," she said with a sigh, and saw that color was coming back into Magda's white face for the first time. "At what hour do you think we will reach Ankara?" she asked.

Sandor was noisily smacking his lips. "With me driving we go like the wind. Another forty miles to Beyzapari, beyond that sixty maybe." He was studying the van. "She has a Land Rover body?"

Colin nodded. "She's a rebuilt Land Rover, yes. Four-wheel drive and all that."

Sandor nodded. "Very good! By early afternoon we get there, or near enough. Then we go by back roads. They are very bad," he added regretfully, "but very very private."

"You are wanted by the police?" inquired Mrs. Pollifax companionably.

Sandor grinned. "You are a nice lady but you ask too many questions. In Ankara I have fine friends and I let you go free."

"Free?" said Mrs. Pollifax with amusement. "I didn't realize we'd been captured."

He patted his pocket with meaning. "I have you under guard, beware. Now wotthehell, let's go."

For some moments Mrs. Pollifax had been aware of a small piper cub plane drifting lazily along the horizon at a distance; she had watched it as Sandor talked. Now with one foot on the running board of the van she said in an alarmed voice, "Colin, look!" For the plane, having momentarily disappeared behind a ridge ahead of them, had suddenly reappeared now and was flying toward them at a shockingly low altitude. Colin stood behind her carrying the camp stove and squinting at the sky. The sound of the plane's engine grew frighteningly loud and for a moment Mrs. Pollifax wondered if they were going to be strafed: the plane passed so low that she could clearly see the face of the pilot, who in turn looked down at them; and then just as abruptly the plane's nose lifted, it climbed and began a long circle that carried it over the ridge again and away toward Ankara.

"Damn fool," Sandor shouted, shaking a fist at the horizon.

Colin said in a choked voice, "What the devil does that mean!"

"Reconnaissance, I think," said Mrs. Pollifax. "But by whom?" She was rather unnerved by the incident; until now she had felt safely removed from Istanbul, but she resolutely put aside her anxiety, helped Magda back to her cot and insisted that Colin have the dubious honor of napping on the floor because he was the more tired from driving. Again she took the passenger seat, this time beside Sandor, and they set off - or rather flew off, thought Mrs. Pollifax, clinging to the sides of the leather seat, for Sandor drove with abandon, swerving gaily around the holes in the road, swearing in Turkish and English at the holes he did not miss, and frequently taking both hands off the wheel to rub dust from his eyes or to light an evil-smelling cigar which almost immediately was extinguished.

They climbed now to a ravined and arid plateau, and the dust they raised all but obscured the sun. It was hot, the van captured and retained both the heat and the dust, and their water supply was gone. Since leaving Nallihan they had passed only one car and that one had been abandoned beside the road—probably with a broken axle, thought Mrs. Pollifax ominously. Nothing moved except the mountains on the horizon, which swam in the rising heat like mirages, until far ahead of them Mrs.

Pollifax saw an approaching cloud of dust. "Dust storm?" she inquired – it was impossible to doze at all with Sandor at the wheel, and he had just finished telling her that dust storms were frequent in summer on the road to Ankara.

"Car," he said briefly.

Mrs. Pollifax nodded; she had begun to feel that if Sandor said it was a car it would be a car – and as it drew nearer it was indeed a car, a very old dusty touring car of 1920 vintage. The sun shone across its windshield, turning it opaque, so that as it approached them it appeared to be driven by remote control. It was therefore all the more startling to Mrs. Pollifax when she saw a hand and then an arm extend full-length from the passenger side of the car. When she saw the gun in that hand she stiffened. "Watch out – a gun!" she cried, and ducked her head just as the windshield in front of her splintered.

Sandor virtually stood on the brakes. "Wotthehell," he shouted, and fought the steering wheel to get them off the road.

Behind her Colin shouted, "Stay down, Mrs. Pollifax!"

Metal protested, tires squealed and Mrs. Pollifax's hat fell off as the van lurched across the ridge that contained the road; they bumped uncomfortably over untilled ground. Sandor was tugging at his belt with one hand; he brought out his gun but the car had already passed them: the sound of a second bullet rang *ping!* against the rear of the van.

In alarm Mrs. Pollifax turned and saw that Colin was reacting with astonishing efficiency; he had remembered that he had a gun, too, and now he was slashing at the glass in the round porthole window in the back; as she watched she saw him lift the gun he had taken from Stefan and push it through the window. She thought he fired it, but there was too much confusion to know. Sandor was swearing as he fought the wheel again, turning the van to head it back to the road.

"Look out!" screamed Mrs. Pollifax as the van swung around, for the ancient dust-ridden car had also turned and was heading toward them at accelerated speed, hoping to ram them if it couldn't shoot their tires first. For a second the van's wheels spun uselessly in a gully, then Sandor roared the engine and the van shot back on to the road just as the elderly Packard left it. A bullet zoomed over Sandor's head, again just missed Mrs. Pollifax and went out the open window. But Sandor had fired, too. He seemed to have three hands, one for the gearshift, one for the wheel, and one for firing. With a wrench of the wheel he turned and backed the van and tried to shoot down the car but the Packard swerved, circled and returned to the road to face them head-on.

They remained like this for several seconds, each car facing the other on the road with a distance of perhaps twenty yards between them, each

driver revving his engine and waiting. Then with a burst of noise the Packard started down the road at full speed, heading directly toward them. "*Hoooooweeeeee*," shouted Sandor, his eyes shining—it was clearly a game to him—and he recklessly steered the van straight at the Packard, not giving an inch. Mrs. Pollifax screamed and slid from seat to floor. From here she looked up to see a familiar face—Otto's—almost at their window, saw the Packard hurtle past them, barely missing them. As the Packard passed from sight she heard Colin's gun begin firing from the rear window, heard the scream of tires, a terrifying sound of metal twisting and turning, twisting and rolling, and Mrs. Pollifax put her hands to her face. "They've turned over," cried Sandor, braking, and leaped out.

Mrs. Pollifax slid from her side of the van and jumped to the road. The Packard was lying upside down in the dust after rolling over several times. Mrs. Pollifax began to run. "We must help them," she cried, and then suddenly the silence was rent by a great explosion and flames turned the Packard into a funeral pyre. Mrs. Pollifax stepped back and covered her eyes. "Did anyone get out?" she gasped in horror.

Colin was beside her with a hand on her shoulder. He looked pale and shaken. "No," he said. "I watched. It was Otto driving, and a man I'd never seen before doing the shooting."

Sandor said belligerently, "What the hell goes on here, they maniacs? Nuts? They tried to kill us!" He looked incredulous. "What the hell they want?" he said, shaking a fist.

"Us," Mrs. Pollifax told him in a trembling voice.

He gaped at her. "Those jerks were gunning for *you*?"

Mrs. Pollifax nodded a little wearily. "Yes. First they sent the plane—there must have been radio communication, and then—"

Sandor looked from her to Colin and back again. "But why?" he demanded indignantly.

Mrs. Pollifax said weakly, "They apparently didn't want us to get to Ankara."

"That I could see for myself but what the hell's going on?"

Mrs. Pollifax hesitated and then recklessly took the plunge. "You might as well know, Sandor, that not only *those* men are after us but the police, too."

"Police!" He stared blankly. "You?"

"Yes."

His mouth dropped. "You *did* shoot the guy you was unloading in the cemetery!"

"No," she said patiently, "but Otto did—the man driving the Packard."

A light of comprehension dawned in Sandor's eyes. "I'll be damned," he said, and to Mrs. Pollifax's surprise he gave her a look of grudging admiration. "I'll be damned," he said again, scratching his head, and then he began to laugh. "You're crooks too!" he cried delightedly.

Colin interrupted primly. "I say, I resent that very much!"

Sandor was wiping his eyes with a filthy handkerchief. "No offense, I know we're not in the same league." He grinned at them both. "So when I picked you up in the cemetery back there—and you let me come along like that—you was really picking me up!" He shook his head admiringly. "I thought I had you two scared to death of me."

Mrs. Pollifax said soberly, "I don't think we should stand here talking like this. I think we should leave before someone sees the smoke and comes to find out what's happened. Colin, do go back and reassure Magda." Still she remained standing and staring at the smoldering wreckage. "It could have been us," she said with a shudder. "They intended it to be us. Sandor, you did a remarkable job of driving."

He was still regarding her with amazement. "That guy Colin had a gun—he had it all the time. And you got gangsters after you I picked a helluva bunch of people to hitch a ride with!" The expression in his eyes was one of infinite respect. "I know a guy could use you. You want to make some real money? I'll introduce you when we get to Ankara."

"I'm not sure Ankara's a good place for us to head," said Mrs. Pollifax sadly. "Not now. There may be roadblocks. And thank you but I don't need any 'real money,' I just want to get safely out of Turkey."

Sandor nodded wisely. "That bad then," he said, escorting her back to the van. After handing her up to the front he appeared to have reached a decision. "You come to Ankara," he said firmly. "Ankara's the place for you. I got good friends there, you hear? A little crooked"—he shrugged and grinned "but wotthehell, you need help. If anybody can smuggle you into Ankara it's me, Sandor, and there my friends help you, wait and see."

Mrs. Pollifax looked into his face and was touched by his concern. "Thank you, Sandor," she said simply.

From the rear of the van Colin said bitterly, "He probably thinks he's bringing his pals two bona fide members of the Mafia."

CHAPTER 9

IN LANGLEY, VIRGINIA, IT WAS TUESDAY MORNING, JUST HALF-PAST eight and already over ninety degrees in the streets. Carstairs had arrived in his air-conditioned office high in the CIA building and was sipping a second cup of coffee as he read over dispatches that had come in during the night. He had just lighted a cigarette when Bishop walked in. "Sir," he said.

"Yes, Bishop, what is it?"

He held out a sheet of paper. "It's a routine report that arrived at the clearing office a few minutes ago from the State Department. They shipped it up here as fast as they could. It seems that during the night the State Department received an urgent request from Istanbul for the verification of one Mrs. Emily Pollifax, an alleged American traveling under an allegedly American passport."

"What the devil!" said Carstairs, scowling. He took the sheet of paper and stared at it. It was, as Bishop had said, one of the routine memos that circulated through a number of channels until it ended, heaven only knew where, as a fifth copy of what already had been filed in the Passport Division of the State Department. Its message was innocent enough but reading it Carstairs experienced his first uneasiness.

"I don't like it," he said.

"No, sir."

"I don't like it at all."

"No, sir."

"I see it's stamped five-fifteen A.M. upon arrival here. What time would that have been in Istanbul?"

"Nine-fifteen last night, sir."

Carstairs swore. "Only an hour following Mrs. Pollifax's first attempt to meet Ferenci-Sabo then." He didn't understand, of all the people mov-

ing in and out of Istanbul, what on earth could have drawn the attention of the police to Mrs. Pollifax? Her passport had been arranged on a top-priority basis and had been processed in less than an hour; had there been something important omitted in the processing? Had it appeared different or even forged to the police? No, that was impossible, he had double-checked it thoroughly himself.

"This is not calculated to induce calm," he said dryly. "When the police single out one person out of thousands—and that person happens to be an agent of ours then a certain bleak note enters the picture." He shook his head. "We can't contact the Istanbul police, our interest would only produce a reaction that would be the despair of our diplomats the right hand must never know what the left hand is doing," he added, and stubbed out one cigarette and lighted another.

But a possibility had occurred to him. "We can't do anything directly, Bishop, but we can be devious. Contact Barnes over in the State Department. Ask him if he'd mind cabling our consulate over there in Istanbul, in his name, to ask why the hell the Turkish police questioned the legal passport of one of our American citizens. I've got a meeting upstairs in five minutes but keep me posted if it lasts longer than I expect."

"Yes, sir. He's to make his inquiry routine but ask for immediate information?"

"Right. If the police have gone so far as to question Mrs. Pollifax the consulate ought to know about it. If they don't know, they'd jolly well better find out. I'm curious to say the least!"

"Right, sir."

When Carstairs returned from his meeting there was still no word. He sat back and reflected upon Mrs. Pollifax's schedule. She would have arrived in Istanbul about four yesterday afternoon at least he knew now that she had arrived safely, he thought dryly. But at nine o'clock, or soon after, the Istanbul police had sent off a cable asking that her credentials be verified by the American government. Routine curiosity? Was the Hotel Itep under surveillance now? Had Mrs. Pollifax been injured, or even killed?

The reply, when it came in from the American consulate, was brief. The Istanbul police had questioned one Mrs. Emily Pollifax for half an hour during the preceding evening but they refused to say why they had taken her to central headquarters for questioning. They had retained her passport for twenty-four hours; upon receiving verification of her identity they were now prepared to return the passport to her. Mrs. Pollifax had not been located yet, however. She was registered at the Hotel Itep but had not been seen there since late Monday evening.

At this Carstairs swore again, briefly but savagely. "Not been seen! Not been located! And she doesn't have her passport?"

"No, sir," said Bishop. "They're still holding it for her."

"Thank God she's got Henry with her, but where the hell can she go without a passport?" demanded Carstairs. "Damn it, I'm helpless. I can't find out one blessed thing without endangering Ferenci-Sabo as well as Mrs. Pollifax, not to mention the goodwill of the Turkish government."

"There's Dr. Belleaux, sir."

He shook his head. "Not yet. I wanted absolute secrecy on Mrs. Pollifax and I've got it, blast it, in fact I'm stuck with it. I'd contact Henry before I risked anyone else—but if Mrs. Pollifax is not in the hotel then it's not likely he'd be, either. Bishop, someone's knocking on the door."

"Yes, sir." Bishop opened it and returned bearing an interservice message. "From Barnes, sir, in the State Department. He's heard from the American consulate in Istanbul again."

"Again?"

"Yes, sir. He's scrawled a note here saying he doesn't know what's up—or want to—and he's too much of a coward to phone you with this news."

"What news?" asked Carstairs in a hollow voice. "Read it, Bishop."

"Yes, sir. It's a cable: REGRET INFORM YOU BODY OF AMERICAN CITIZEN HENRY MILES—"

"Body?" echoed Carstairs in a stricken voice.

"Yes, sir. Shall I go on?"

Carstairs nodded, his face grim.

" OF HENRY MILES DISCOVERED EARLY THIS MORNING IN USKUDAR CEMETERY STOP."

"Cemetery!"

"ONLY CLUE HANDWRITTEN NOTE APPENDED TO BODY QUOTE THIS IS HENRY MILES HOTEL ITEP STOP POLICE HAVE IDENTIFIED HANDWRITING AS BELONGING TO—" Bishop suddenly stopped and swallowed hard.

"They've got a lead?" broke in Carstairs savagely. "Get on with it, Bishop, for heaven's sake!"

—"BELONGING TO MRS. EMILY POLLIFAX, AMERICAN CITIZEN OF—"

"What?" exploded Carstairs.

—"OF NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY, AND REGISTERED AT SAME HOTEL."

"Oh no," groaned Carstairs.

Bishop nodded. "Yes, sir. Emily is cutting quite a swath, isn't she? There's one more sentence, sir—"

"Then finish it," growled Carstairs.

"WARRANT ISSUED FOR HER ARREST."

"Good God," said Carstairs and slumped back into his chair. "Henry dead—our second agent killed inside of forty-eight hours over there; Mrs. Pollifax missing, and not a single word on Ferenci-Sabo." He sighed and shook his head. "It just about ends our attempt to contact Ferenci-Sabo, Bishop. If Mrs. Pollifax is still alive and there's no certainty that they didn't get her, too—she's been rendered helpless without a passport. What can she do, where can she go? We'll have to proceed on the assumption that she can be of no more help to us."

"Yes, sir."

Carstairs rubbed his brow. "But we've still got to keep that lobby covered every evening until Friday —just in case. Is Hawkins still in London?"

Bishop nodded.

Carstairs sighed. "Apparently it's like dropping people into a bottomless well to send them to Istanbul, but we must keep trying. Fix up a telephone connection, will you Bishop? I'll give Hawkins the most superficial of briefings and if Ferenci-Sabo is still alive—the chances grow less every hour he'll have to hide her in a cellar somewhere until we can think what to do next. Damn," he added.

"And Mrs. Pollifax, sir?"

Carstairs nodded. "I was coming to that. Send off a cable to Dr. Belleaux, Bishop. Alert him to the fact that Mrs. Emily Pollifax is one of our people, and may try to reach him, in which case we'd appreciate his giving her what help he can without bringing the roof down upon all our heads."

"Yes, sir."

Again he shook his head. "Not much else we can do for her, Bishop." He added irritably, "Oh, and add a full description of her for Dr. Belleaux so that he'll know precisely what she looks like, Bishop—and don't forget that damned flowered hat!"

CHAPTER 10

CAREFULLY SANDOR INCHED THE VAN THROUGH STREETS SO NARROW the houses could be touched on either side. Frequently their passage was halted by a donkey ambling ahead of them, or by women carrying jugs of water on their heads. There was no coolness in the shade. It was three o'clock in the afternoon and sun and dust lay heavy in the alleys, trapping smells of spices, charcoal, olive oil and manure. Mrs. Pollifax's impression of their entry into Ankara had been chaotic: they appeared to have approached the city by means of a dried-up river bed over which they had clattered and bumped, half-circling Ankara before darting furtively across one tree-lined boulevard to vanish into the old town. As they climbed higher now in this maze of streets Mrs. Pollifax glimpsed the top of the citadel ahead and then lost it. A moment later the van halted; Sandor wrestled furiously with the steering wheel and backed the van slowly, laboriously, through a hole in a crumbling wall. Bricks toppled and a fresh cloud of dust enveloped them.

They emerged in a courtyard, abandoned except for a solitary goat, tied to a ring in the wall, who lifted his head and brayed at them in protest. An old adobe building opened into the courtyard, its roof open to the sky, its walls giving shade to the few sparse tufts of grass on which the animal fed.

Sandor cut the engine. "We walk now but you wait first," he said firmly. "I go find Bengziz Madrali. He is receiver of stolen goods—I make sure he receive *you* now."

"How long will you be gone?" asked Mrs. Pollifax anxiously.

He shrugged. "I have to find him first, then I know how long I'll be gone. If anyone comes, hide in the old *khan*." He was gone before Mrs. Pollifax could protest.

"What's a *khan*?" she asked Colin.

"An inn." Staring at the gate through which Sandor had vanished he said, "I rather like him but I can't think why."

"That's very reassuring since we're completely dependent on him for the moment," Mrs. Pollifax pointed out. "Do you like Magda too?"

His gaze left the gate to sweep the courtyard. "She seems pleasant enough when she's not drugged. But then she nearly always is, isn't she?" He brightened. "I say, that looks like a Hittite frieze propping up that door. Hand me my camera, will you?" He began to prowl through the litter around the door, keeping a respectful distance from the goat, who watched him with suspicion.

"How nice to see you again!" Magda said cheerfully, crawling from the interior of the van to sit down beside Mrs. Pollifax on the top step. "Perhaps you can tell me where we are?"

"We've reached Ankara." She noted that Colin had disappeared with his camera into the ruins of the *khan* and she turned to Magda urgently. "We've not been able to talk and you must realize that from my point of view this journey to Yozgat is on faith alone. What *is* it that we go to Yozgat for?"

Magda hesitated. "I dare not say, not yet at least. But let me tell you this: I go to Yozgat to find the people who smuggled me out of Bulgaria and into Turkey." She was thoughtful for a moment and then she added quietly, "I do not know how you feel about gypsies. People hate and fear them. Perhaps you are not aware that in spite of or because of—people's revulsion towards gypsies they were able to do a number of valuable things for the Allies during World War Two—those who were not wiped out by Hitler."

"Gypsies!" exclaimed Mrs. Pollifax in surprise.

"Yes. Some are nomadic and wander all over Europe while some have settled down, like the gypsies in Istanbul who live in what is called the Tin Village." She said almost shyly, "It is with them I hid when I first escaped Stefan and Otto and waited for you."

Mrs. Pollifax said in astonishment, "Do you mean it's the gypsies who got you across the border into Turkey?"

She nodded. "To be accepted by them is not easy, the Rom look on *gorgios* with deep contempt. But many years ago we worked together, I gained their trust, I learned their language, I know a few of them as true friends, and to know a few is to be accepted by them all. Yes, it was with them I crossed the border and it is to the Inglescus that I entrusted everything when I realized I was being followed. They promised to wait for me at Yozgat for a few days before they continued south to their rendezvous, a wedding later in the summer."

"But this is remarkable," said Mrs. Pollifax, delighted. "You have your own private underground!"

Magda's smile deepened. "You put it well. But please, you will remember the name Inglescu if anything goes wrong with me? Find them and say Magda sent you. They will understand."

"But can they be trusted with what you left them?"

"Yes," she said flatly.

"I can't help wondering why you suddenly left your old life. You understand that I was told the whole story about you. Did they find this out?"

Magda smiled. "No, they discovered nothing. I decided to retire."

"Retire!" cried Mrs. Pollifax.

"Yes, retire." At the expression on Mrs. Pollifax's face she burst out laughing. "But did you never think of people like me wishing to retire? I will no doubt be a shock to them —agents are not supposed to survive as long as I, they are supposed to die violently and early. But me, I have just gone on surviving—such an embarrassment!—and without even paying dues to the Social Security."

"What will you plan to do?" asked Mrs. Pollifax eagerly.

Magda shrugged. "I bring my own social security with me, as you will see. I have no plans except I wish to live a quiet life now, I want to plant flowers and watch them grow, feel sun on my face, think good thoughts, have real friends. I am tired of violence, of uncertainty and betrayals, of remaining always detached lest someone I grow to like must be betrayed, or betray me. Most, I am tired of acting the double part. This is how it began, I was an actress on the stage in Vienna, but who would guess I play the roles so long, day and night, on and on."

Mrs. Pollifax looked at her and was curiously touched. She thought of the *Times* biography which could not know or possibly describe — no one could — the complications or dangers which this woman must have met and mastered with intelligence and courage, and always alone. But she thought the story was written clearly in the lines of Magda's face: *Those are good lines*, she thought, *lines of humor and compassion and deep sadness. And I heard her laugh—how did she escape corruption from all this?* Her hand went out to touch Magda's hand and squeeze it. "There is one thing," she said quietly. "Something that complicates our getting to Yozgat and to the gypsies."

"Yes?"

"Before I left Washington I was given the name of a man in Istanbul to whom we could appeal for help if we needed it. A very reliable person whose name is Dr. Guillaume Belleaux."

"Yes?" said Magda with interest. "But that is reassuring."

Mrs. Pollifax shook her head. "The house in which you were drugged last night—the house to which Stefan and Otto took you—turned out to be the home of Dr. Guillaume Belleaux."

Magda's lips formed an O and her eyes widened. "*Mon dieu* but that is *not* reassuring! So this man is—but is he aware that you know this? Did he see you?"

"Yes to both questions." Mrs. Pollifax shook her head wryly as she recalled her exit from Dr. Belleaux's house and the face briefly glimpsed across the livingroom. "He may not have seen Colin, no, but he and I looked at each other across the room. Briefly but memorably."

"Then he is the one behind all this—he too plays the double game!" Magda reached out and gently touched Mrs. Pollifax. "It is a lonely business, this, is it not? I'm sorry. My God I'm sorry. But we must stay alive a little longer to annoy him, yes?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Pollifax but she winced a little as she reflected upon the odds: they did not speak Turkish and they were moving deeper and deeper into Turkey's interior; the police, Stefan and of course Dr. Belleaux were looking for them. She did not even know if Sandor would return, and without him they would be almost completely helpless. She thought that he would come back but he was, after all, a man of doubtful character. Still, it was his temperament, not his character, that was in their favor: she was trusting to his curiosity and to his Machiavellian nature to bring him back, if only to arrange what would happen next.

She looked up and waved at Colin who had wandered out of the inn. He said dreamily, "Just think, these same walls were standing when Tamerlane came through this part of the country." He patted his camera. "I think I got a wonderful shot of that frieze, and the old walls inside; I'm absolutely certain I didn't muff it. No Sandor yet?"

"Here he comes," said Magda.

Mrs. Pollifax looked up to see him loping through the gateway and she had to control her gladness at seeing this disreputable, grinning, filthy man. She thought that even if he shaved and bathed she would recognize him because he would still exude the same boundless joy in living and in outwitting whatever forces resisted him. He had obviously been busy for his arms were full of bundles.

"I am back," he cried. "I have found Bengziz Madrali and he will help—there is much work to do, we go to meet him now but first—good Turkish peasant clothes so you will become incognito."

"Become what?" said Mrs. Pollifax, staring with distaste at what appeared to be a week's laundry that he held out to her.

Obviously he was conferring a great honor upon her. "For you ladies the baggy pants," he said. "Also the skirt, the shirt and the shawl that be-

gins over your heads and goes everywhere I show you its workings." He stuffed them into her arms without sympathy. "And for you," he cried happily to Colin, "the moustachio—a good sweep of one—and a cap and trousers with holes in them. You will look like me, eh? Could anything be better?"

"Oh nothing," Colin said dryly.

"Then wotthehell, change now in the truck and we go. Is better Madrali never see you in your own clothes, he has a feel for intrigue, that man, and the roadblocks are up."

Mrs. Pollifax had been halfway across the courtyard with her new clothes in her arms when he said this. She stopped. "Roadblocks?"

He nodded pleasantly. "Twenty minutes ago. *Pfut*—suddenly they are there. Police stopping everyone. Madrali hears everything, you understand? He says officially it is the new government study of traffic flow but he hears they look for specific peoples." Sandor beamed at them. "You do not wish to be specific peoples, do you? Incognito please at once!"

Mrs. Pollifax thought the room looked exactly like a thieves' den, and she discovered with some surprise that she felt delightfully at ease in such an atmosphere. Shadows leaped up the walls and across the ceiling from candles burning in their sockets and from the charcoal brazier on which their dinner of *tel kadayif* and *pilaf* had been cooked. On one whitewashed wall hung a picture of Ataturk in an unusually convivial, smiling pose. On the other side of the brazier, seated cross-legged on the floor with a tray on his lap, Bengziz Madrali squinted over the three cards of identity he was forging for them. Occasionally he grunted expressively as he examined his work through a jeweler's glass, and occasionally he flashed Mrs. Pollifax a smile laden with warm reassurance and admiration.

"Your name is now Yurgadil Aziz," commented Sandor, eating noisily with his fingers from a platter and looking over Madrali's shoulder. "The other lady is Nimet Aziz, and he"—pointing a dripping finger at Colin—"is Nazmi Aziz."

Lost: one Emily Pollifax, she thought, and glanced ruefully at the black baggy pants engulfing her legs.

From the corner Magda gave an amused laugh. Her hair had been dyed brown from a bottle that Madrali had purchased in the bazaar; and then it had been washed and set in fat steel curlers that bristled gruesomely all over her head. She sat and smoked a Turkish cigarette with elegant fastidiousness, her hands moving gracefully but without any sign of being attached to her body, which had become lost somewhere

inside her voluminous Turkish disguise. Near her sat Colin, loading his still camera with film for the passport photograph he was going to take of Magda when the curlers were removed and her hair combed. Catching Mrs. Pollifax's glance he said irritably, "Soon? You know I've got to develop the picture and then it's got to dry!"

In appearance she thought he outdid them all. He wore shabby pinstripe trousers tied with a belt of rope, a vest too tight across his chest, a purple shirt and a pink bowtie. His sweeping moustache left him almost mouthless and because he wasn't accustomed to it he kept trying to look down at it, which caused his eyes to cross. He also complained that it itched. Yet in spite of all this he had acquired a definite air of distinction. In some indescribable manner his new identity brought out the fierceness in him that Mrs. Pollifax had noticed when she first met him but which she had assumed was a defense against failure, and against taller and more successful men. But freed of any possible competitiveness, and wearing the most absurdly shabby clothes, Colin *was* fierce. There was no mistaking it: there was a look about him of a mountain brigand.

There is more of his family in him than he knows, thought Mrs. Pollifax with amusement. She stood up and walked over to Magda and felt her head. It was dry. Removing the curlers she said, "Mr. Madrali, you have the suntan make-up? You have the white backdrop for the passport picture?"

"*Evet, evet*," he said, nodding. "Over there, pliss."

Colin shook his head. "I still can't imagine how you expect to get her out of the country when we can't even get out of Ankara."

"I go look into that now and make more questions," Sandor said, reluctantly putting aside his plate of food. "The new ideas they come and go. Now I go."

"Good. The white blouse, please," said Mrs. Pollifax, helping Magda out of her Turkish clothes and into her own navy blue suit.

Sandor stopped and looked down at Magda. "Wotthehell she can't leave a country without a passport."

"She has a passport," Mrs. Pollifax said calmly as she began applying tan make-up to Magda's white face.

"Wotthehell, you forge those too?"

"It's a very respectable passport," she told him, "and very legal. There," she said, applying lipstick to Magda. "I think she looks rather like a poetess or an undernourished actress, don't you, Colin?"

Sandor went out, looking mystified. Colin said, "You're quite right, I wouldn't have believed it possible."

Flashbulbs illuminated the room several times before its native dim-

ness returned, and then Magda lay down and promptly went to sleep. Colin at once became tiresomely cross and nervous about developing the film, and since Mr. Madrali's English was severely limited and he was still engrossed in his forgeries, Mrs. Pollifax opened the door and walked out.

The tiny house in which Mr. Madrali lived -or hid, as the case might be—leaned against the walls of the Citadel, even belonged to the wall of the Citadel, like something washed up against the sides of an old ship. Mounting the tamped down earthern path behind his house Mrs. Pollifax put back her head and looked up at the wall that had withstood a thousand years of earthquakes, pillage and armies, and then she looked down at the crooked, meandering alleys below, with their rows of primitive hovels dropping to the base of the hill. The sun was just disappearing behind the distant mountains leaving a blaze of glorious color in the sky but on the plains surrounding Ankara twilight had already fallen, and lights were beginning to glitter along Ankara's streets and avenues.

As she stood transfixed the last notes of a muezzin's chant reached her ears from below, sounding phantom in the high clear air, and Mrs. Pollifax thought, *I must remember this moment*, and then, *I shall have to come back and really see this country*. Yet she knew that if she did come back it would be entirely different. It was the unexpected that brought to these moments this tender, unnameable rush of understanding, this joy in being alive. It was safety following danger, it was food after hours of hunger, rest following exhaustion, it was the astonishing strangers who had become her friends. It was this and more, until the richness of living caught at her throat, and all the well-meant security with which people surrounded themselves was exposed for what it truly was: a wall to keep out life, a conceit, a mad delusion.

She was still standing there when Sandor walked up the steep path. It had become quite dark; she realized with a start that she had been standing there for a long time. "Is that you?" he said, peering at her. Little squares and stripes of light lay behind him on the path, formed by the shuttered and open windows of the surrounding houses.

"Yes," she said. "Where have you been?"

He said buoyantly, "I have biggest good luck! The twice-a-week bus for Yozgat leaves at dawn. It will be hot, cheap, very crowded. I went to Taksim Square to be sure already the families sleep there waiting."

"Bus?" said Mrs. Pollifax wonderingly. "But won't the police be stopping the busses too?"

"When you see the busses you understand," he said cryptically. "Only

Turks take them—tourists never!—and they buy tickets distantly ahead. But wotthehell, for big price I get four tickets to Yozgat."

He said modestly, "For a little extra I come too. You need me for the translations."

She turned and looked at him gratefully. "Oh yes, we do need you, Sandor, but I scarcely dared hope—Aren't you wanted by the police too, Sandor? Who are you really?"

"A scoundrel," he said with a grin. "Who are *you*, really?"

She laughed. "Obviously I ask too many questions."

"That you do, yes." He shrugged. "Be comfortable, don't itch. It is like a story of Nasr-ed-Din Hodja who went through the East many hundreds of years ago. His stories live everywhere. One of them is that Nasr-ed-Din was walking a road one dark night when he saw three men coming toward him. 'Oho,' he thinks, 'they may be robbers' so he jumps over a wall and hides behind a rock. The three men see this and are curious and they too jump over the rock and go to him. 'What is wrong?' they ask. 'What are you doing here?' And Nasr-ed-Din sees the truth of it that they are not robbers—and he says, 'Oh gentlemen, I will tell you why we are all here. I am here because of *you*, and you are here because of *me*.' "

Mrs. Pollifax smiled. "A most philosophical parable. Are there more of them?"

"*Evet*. Another story is that Nasr-ed-Din said he could see in the dark. Someone said to him, 'That may be so, Nasr-ed-Din but if this is true why then do you always carry a candle at night?' Nasr-ed-Din said, 'Why, to prevent other people from bumping into me!' "

Mrs. Pollifax laughed delightedly.

Sandor took her arm. "More I tell you another time. Please, go inside now before we are heard speaking English. Tomorrow at dawn we go to Yozgat."

CHAPTER 11

HAVING BEEN OFFICIALLY HIRED AS THEIR GUIDE, SANDOR TOOK them over with stern authority. He allowed them to sleep until three o'clock in the morning and then he prodded them awake. "For you to be real peasants you get up now. You will do rest of the sleeping in Taksim Square, please. Like others."

The three of them arose stiffly from their floormats. They would have to wash on their way down the hill, at the public well, Sandor told them; Madrali was bringing them tea and fruit for their breakfast. They would also be carrying their lunch on the bus with them—it was already packed in a basket: two jugs of water and the remains of their evening meal. He produced a small cardboard suitcase that looked as if it had been possessed by a dozen other people first. Into this Mrs. Pollifax packed her suit for Magda to wear, and Colin added a number of spare reels of film. His cameras he insisted upon carrying in a string bag. Mrs. Pollifax again checked her pantaloons for the wads of money and Magda's passport, all secured with large safety pins. Her flowered hat was presented to Mr. Madrali with instructions to dispose of it, as well as her useless, emptied purse.

They started out in the pale light of dawn, and at the base of the hill wrung Mr. Madrali's hands, thanked him and were once again on their own, a little more secure in their new identities but a little less secure at being on the street.

"I think I could get to like these baggy pants," said Mrs. Pollifax, lengthening her stride. "Is my headgear properly wrapped? Are you sure we're all right, with everything where it should be?"

"Good, very good," Sandor said gravely. "Except slower—please! You act like American. Dressed as you are dressed you come from a small village—do not walk so fast, so happy, and please—stay behind us men!"

He shrugged apologetically. "Not for myself, you understand, who know precisely who you are but for the role, the act. Anatolian women, they work hard, say nothing. And to wear the shawl pulled so across the mouth you must be very shy, very small village. You understand?"

"All right."

Sandor added, "You do not look so Turkish as the other lady, you see."

"Oh—sorry," she said contritely, falling still another pace behind him and Colin.

"And stop talking English," contributed Colin, delivering the final snub.

Magda's eyes were gleaming over her veil with amusement. "It worked," she said.

"What did?"

"You look properly cowed and snubbed now. Your shoulders droop, you look shamed and subservient."

Mrs. Pollifax said in a peevish undertone—she really had been feeling expansive "It's all very well for you he said you look the part."

"*Touché*," said Magda with a throaty little laugh that reminded Mrs. Pollifax she would be delightful company under more relaxed circumstances. They turned down a broad, tree-rimmed boulevard lined with buildings so modern that Mrs. Pollifax might have forgotten she was in the Near East but for the sight of goats being herded down a side street, and a flock of turkeys being driven screeching, wings flapping, across an intersection.

When they reached the square they learned what Sandor had meant about bus transportation to Yozgat. A bulging and ancient wooden vehicle stood beside the curb "It's early," explained Sandor and around it squatted dozens of families who looked as if they had been waiting all night long. Sandor reminded them they must not speak to anyone, not even to one another, but smile and keep smiling agreeably. They silently sat beside the others. After about an hour the driver of the bus came whistling across the boulevard, unlocked the bus and began shouting orders to the passengers to bring their suitcases to him for storage on top of the bus. A policeman wandered over and watched, then alarmed Mrs. Pollifax by asking to see the cards of identity and the bus tickets of everyone waiting to leave.

"Do not panic," whispered Sandor. "Steady does it."

When the policeman reached Mrs. Pollifax she concentrated on looking as small and submissive as possible. "Yurgadil Aziz," he said musingly, as he examined her identity card. "Bilet?" he added, holding out his hand.

Sandor arose, spoke easily in Turkish and produced four bus tickets

from his pocket. Mrs. Pollifax gathered that she had been asked for her ticket, and because the tickets had all been sold days earlier the possession of one precluded any of them being newly arrived Americans wanted by the police. The tickets were handed back, the policeman moved on, the bus driver shouted, passengers shouted, and like lemmings rushing to the sea they swarmed onto the bus. A child vomited. A pig squealed. Those without seats sat on the floor. Men and women laughed and congratulated themselves upon being there, and the trip to Yozgat was begun.

Seven hours and one hundred and thirty-eight miles later the bus jolted into Yozgat following innumerable stops to cool and refill an aging radiator, exercise children, revive fainting women and change a tire. After seven hours in such cramped quarters any disguises had become academic: everyone aboard knew that three of the passengers did not speak Turkish but no one appeared to even question the fact or to care. They were foreigners and therefore guests. Whether they were Yugoslavs or Rumanians or Bulgars apparently no one even conceived of their being Americans—they were treated charmingly: smiled at, handed grapes, peaches and sweets and offered seats on the aisle several inches farther from the dust that billowed in through the open windows. Nevertheless the seven hours seemed endless and Mrs. Pollifax could feel only compassion for the majority of the passengers who were bound for Sivas. "When will they get there?" she asked Sandor.

He shrugged. "Six o'clock, eight o'clock, midnight, who knows? Only Allah. But do not worry, they are having the time of their lives."

"Magda isn't. She's looking horrible again."

"I will help her. Then I make discreet questions about the gypsies you seek," said Sandor. "There are always men in the square, and in a town like this everyone knows everybody else's business. I have thought further. In Yozgat there will not be many cars, and few gasolines. It will be less prominent to rent a horse and wagon. Wotthehell, okay?"

"What the hell okay," said Mrs. Pollifax with a smile, and as the bus halted in Yozgat square, honking its horn dramatically, she stood up and looked for Colin, who had become trapped in the aisle in back of her and could only wave and shrug.

Magda was helped from her seat by Sandor, and the three of them made their way to the front of the bus. Sandor jumped down first, followed by Magda, who almost fell into his arms, and Mrs. Pollifax stepped down behind them, lifted her head to look around her at Yozgat, and abruptly stiffened.

A man had separated himself from the cluster of people on the pave-

ment, and had stepped forward to scrutinize each passenger as they dismounted. Now he was staring attentively into Mrs. Pollifax's half-concealed face; his glance moved to include Sandor and then fell upon Magda who swayed on Sandor's arm.

The man was easy to recognize because of his small pointed white goatee. She had in fact already exchanged glances with him once, across a crowded Istanbul livingroom. It was Dr. Guillaume Belleaux.

Now he stepped forward and spoke to Mrs. Pollifax in Turkish, his eyes a little amused as they rested on the wisps of hair that escaped her shawl. Before she had even faced the problem of replying his hand moved and he whipped back her scarves to expose her face. "Mrs. Pollifax, is it not?" he said carefully. "Precisely the woman Mr. Carstairs asked me to take care of – which I plan to do at once!"

Mrs. Pollifax stepped back in dismay.

"And your two companions would be Madame Ferenci-Sabo and Mr. Colin Ramsey of Ramsey Enterprises." He lifted an arm and waved to someone across the street. "I am aware that you know karate," he continued smoothly. "One move toward me and the gun that I hold under this newspaper will kill you."

"Wotthehell," said Sandor, but whether he was shocked at being mistaken for Colin, or by news of the gun, it was impossible to guess.

Mrs. Pollifax sighed. To get safely away from the searching Ankara police they had endured those seven uncomfortable hours on a bus only to walk into Dr. Belleaux's waiting arms. It did seem unfair, and exactly the sort of thing to blunt initiative.

"The car is coming – patience, please," said Dr. Belleaux. "We have only a few streets to go, and I advise you to enter the car quietly." He turned and looked at Colin, who stood paralyzed on the bottom step of the bus, gaping at him. He said sharply, *"Hareket etmek—cabucak!"*

Colin closed his mouth – he had looked singularly stupid with it open—and to Mrs. Pollifax's astonishment he snarled, "*Evet, evet*," in a low surly voice and walked stiffly and angrily away.

For a moment Mrs. Pollifax was incredulous and then it dawned upon her that Dr. Belleaux had not recognized Colin; he had looked for two women and a man and he had found them without realizing that four of them traveled together now, or that Colin was also a member of the party. Colin, bless him, had understood this perfectly, and at once.

She and Sandor exchanged a long glance, and then the car drew up behind the bus and Dr. Belleaux said sharply, "Get in, please!" He held the door open. "No, Mr. Ramsey, sit in front, please, where I can shoot you if you prove difficult."

To enlighten confused Sandor Mrs. Pollifax said coldly, "Allow me to

introduce you. I believe this is Dr. Guillaume Belleaux — you are, aren't you?—the leader of the gang who tried to kill us on the road to Ankara." The impact of this on Sandor was appreciable: she saw his eyes blaze before they went studiously blank. "The gentleman beside you," she added tartly, "is Stefan, who works with Dr. Belleaux and abducts people and drugs them, too."

Ignoring her Dr. Belleaux leaned forward. "Leave now, Stefan, the bus will remain here for some time, I think. You know the way? That street over there, then left and a sharp right."

The car turned off the square, past a corner store whose signs read CIKOLATA SIGARA KOKA-KOLA (*I can read that*, thought Mrs. Pollifax numbly) and down a cobbled street that soon turned into a solidly packed dirt road of the most primitive type. "Where are we going?" inquired Mrs. Pollifax.

"Not far," confided Dr. Belleaux; his voice was friendly and gracious; he was obviously a born host. "It seemed wisest to rent one of Yozgat's abandoned houses, while we waited for you. We have expected you, of course, and I guessed you would have to arrive in some kind of disguise, or not at all, with the police looking for you so assiduously. But of course the police have never known that you were coming to Yozgat. It gave Stefan and myself *such* a pleasant advantage!" He leaned forward. "To the right now, Stefan. When you reach the house drive the car around to the rear. I don't wish it seen from the road." To Mrs. Pollifax he said in a kindly voice, "I have a gun, you know. Several, to be exact. It is best if you understand now that there is nothing for you to do but relax and tell me all I wish to know. Then we shall understand one another — once you understand your situation."

They had pulled up beside a low, dusty stone house with a shuttered and empty look. The nearest house stood a quarter of a mile away. Stefan backed, and then drove up a rutted track to the back yard and cut the engine.

Dr. Belleaux said, "Assim is inside — blow the horn once, lightly. We will tie their hands tightly for the walk into the house."

When the door shut behind them it closed out all sunshine. Not even the shutters betrayed lines or threads of light. They stood in darkness until Dr. Belleaux lighted a candle, and then a lantern. "In here," he said and they were pushed into one of the two back rooms.

This was a room like a shed; obviously animals had once shared it with humans during cold winter nights. The floor was of beaten earth; a pile of old hay still filled one corner and there was a strong smell of must and manure. Once there had been a rear door but it had been

bricked in but not whitewashed. Three straight wooden chairs occupied the center of the room; one by one they were tied to them, first their hands behind their backs and then their ankles. When this had been accomplished by Assim, whose face was sullen and cruel, Dr. Belleaux beckoned his helpmeets into the other room and Mrs. Pollifax could hear them speaking together in Turkish in low voices. She said softly, "Magda –you are all right?"

Magda lifted her head and wanly smiled. "For the moment, yes. But to come finally to Yozgat, to be so close " She stopped.

Sandor said in a voice choked with rage. "You understand even I have heard of this Dr. Belleaux. I am still shocked, still in a daze. There must be the way to get free. Must!"

Mrs. Pollifax sighed. "Such as what?"

"There's Colin."

Mrs. Pollifax said gently, "What can he do? He doesn't even know where we are."

"Surely something!"

"What?"

Sandor was silent and then he said angrily, "I don't know!"

"He doesn't know where we've been taken," repeated Mrs. Pollifax, "and if he did, what could be done? He is alone, completely inexperienced and unaccustomed to violence."

"Since meeting you he has seen a little," pointed out Sandor dryly, and as the voices broke off in the other room he said, "We cannot just die like trussed pigs, there has to come a moment, just one " He was silent as Dr. Belleaux re-entered the room.

"Ah there you are!" said Dr. Belleaux, as if he had absent-mindedly misplaced them. "We have just been consulting on the arrangements. I have an interest in a small archaeological dig not far from here you will be buried there tonight." He chuckled. "In a few years you may be dug up and acclaimed a real archaeological find!"

"Very amusing," said Mrs. Pollifax tartly. "And Mr. Carstairs? What will you tell him?"

Dr. Belleaux smiled charmingly. "Why, that I searched everywhere but that you and your little party had vanished from the face of the earth!"

"He really cabled you about me?" Mrs. Pollifax asked curiously.

Dr. Belleaux leaned against the wall and looked down at her in a friendly fashion. "Oh indeed yes, just last evening, and giving a very full description of you which of course proved at once how dangerous you are to me! He had cabled me earlier about Henry Miles, naturally, but failed to mention you. It was fairly simple to dispose of Miles as well as

the first chap whom I believed Miles was replacing, but I really had no idea who you worked for. When you stole Ferenci-Sabo from under my very nose—in full view of my friends—I still had no idea you worked for Carstairs, can you imagine?"

"How stupid you must feel," she agreed pleasantly. "For how many years have you been a double agent?"

"It scarcely matters," he said modestly. "Actually I've been what is usually referred to as a 'sleeper.' That is, held in abeyance for something truly worthwhile. Although I won't say I've not taken advantage of my privileged situation to cast a few stones," he confided charmingly. "An innuendo here, a lifted eyebrow there—" He obligingly lifted an eyebrow. "But Ferenci-Sabo's defection was big enough to bring orders for me to capture her at any cost, including my usefulness as a friend of the Americans and the Turks." He smiled. "However—happily for me—the cost looks very small indeed. By tomorrow I can look forward to resuming my *very* pleasant life in Istanbul again. For now, however," he concluded, his voice changing, "I must get to work."

"Hain," growled Sandor.

"What does that mean?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"It means traitor," said Dr. Belleaux indifferently. He walked over to Magda and stared down at her. "Now what I should like to learn first," he said firmly, as if he were interviewing her for a job, "is just why the Americans have been brought into this, and how they were contacted. I find that—shall I say very suspicious?" He continued looking at Magda. "Lift your head!" he demanded sharply.

Slowly Magda lifted her head. "I want you to talk," he said in a suddenly cold and chilling voice. "You will tell me why and how you contacted Mr. Carstairs. You will tell me where are the papers you brought with you, and why you insisted on coming to Yozgat."

"No," said Magda.

Dr. Belleaux began to hit Magda across the cheekbones, methodically and viciously, and Mrs. Pollifax closed her eyes so that no one would see the tears she wept for Magda. Back and forth went the hand—one, two, one, two—but in his savagery Dr. Belleaux had miscalculated Magda's stamina. Her head suddenly went limp—she had mercifully fainted.

"Bastard," shouted Sandor.

Dr. Belleaux turned toward Mrs. Pollifax, and as she realized that her turn was next she closed her eyes again. A sudden picture of her sunny apartment in New Brunswick, New Jersey, flashed across her mind and she thought, *Is anything worth all this?* and then she opened her eyes and met Dr. Belleaux's gaze steadily. He stood over her, eyes narrowed, fist lifted, and she prayed for courage.

CHAPTER 12

STEPPING DOWN FROM THE BUS COLIN WAS APPALLED AT THE SIGHT of Dr. Belleaux in conversation with Mrs. Pollifax. It jarred all his senses; he had not glimpsed Dr. Belleaux at his house in Istanbul but he recognized him from newspaper pictures, and it was a shock to see him in the flesh, and here of all places. His second reaction was one of wild relief: everything had to be all right after all, Mrs. Pollifax had been wrong about Dr. Belleaux, and Dr. Belleaux had come to tell her so; and then he realized that this couldn't be so, the man had no business meeting them here in Yozgat, and as his eyes dropped to the newspaper that Dr. Belleaux held in such a peculiar position he instinctively realized there was a gun hidden there. It was all very disappointing and unnerving, and for a moment he thought he was going to be ill. He stood frozen to the bottom step of the bus while behind him voices rose in protest at his blocking the exit.

The protests inevitably drew Dr. Belleaux's attention; he turned, saw Colin staring and spoke sharply to him in Turkish, telling him to get moving, to go away. Colin was astonished to remember that he was in disguise, and was even more astonished to realize that he had not been recognized. He stammered, "*Evet—evet*," and walked away from the bus and then across the street.

There he stopped, suddenly aware that he had nowhere to go. He realized that Mrs. Pollifax and Magda and Sandor had just been captured, and he felt an acute sense of loss. It seemed incredibly unjust after all they'd gone through. He thought dimly of shouting for the police and then he remembered that in joining Mrs. Pollifax he had placed himself beyond such conventional avenues of complaint. This was a chilling thought. There was no one at all to help—no one except himself, of course, and there was nothing he could do. Nothing at all. He saw Dr.

Belleaux lift his arm and wave to a man seated in a parked car, saw the driver nod, turn the car and drive up behind the bus. Over the top of the car he saw the heads of his three friends as they climbed inside, and he heard the doors slam. Then the car pulled out and turned down the street next him. It passed quite near but the shades had been drawn in the rear and he saw only the driver. It was Stefan.

At that moment Colin understood that he was about to see his three friends vanish from sight — he would never know where they went, or see them again. He suddenly found this even less tolerable than his panic.

Furiously he glared at the people around him: wraith-like, ancient men slumped half-drowsing on benches in the shade; a woman dispiritedly sweeping with a twig broom; a boy pulling a loaded donkey across the road, the bus driver loading the bus with what looked like a sack of mail. At the corner he saw a narrow, fly-specked cafe open to the square — one sign said CIKOLATA—SIGARA; another advertised KOKA-KOLA. His glance fell to three old and dusty bicycles leaning against the wall, their owners apparently inside the shop. The car had just turned into the street beside that shop; a cloud of dust rose as it vanished.

Without thinking, and purely from instinct, Colin ran across the street, snatched up one of the fallen bicycles, mounted it and peddled madly down the street into which the black car had turned. There were shouts behind him but he ignored them and peddled faster. He couldn't see the car but he knew it was there because its dust filled his nostrils and choked his throat. He had no idea where he was going, or even why, he knew only that he musn't be separated from the group in the car.

He became increasingly aware that he was being pursued, and the shouts following him annoyed him. He peddled past low rock walls, a dusty vineyard, little houses with peeling stucco until the cobbles came to an end and he faced two unpaved roads. As he hesitated his most immediate pursuer peddled up beside him: it was, of all things, a girl, who proceeded to upbraid him in a flurry of noisy Turkish.

Despairingly, in English, he cried, "I can't understand you, I don't understand a word!"

The torrent went on and then suddenly, her lips open, the girl stopped in mid-sentence, her eyes enormous. "But you speak English! You're not Turkish!"

"Yes, I'm English, and I've lost my friends, they're in that black car that drove down this street, and I'm terribly sorry to have —" He too stopped in mid-sentence. "But I say—you speak English too!"

She said impatiently, "I go to college in Istanbul. But what are you

doing in such clothes? Are you a sociologist studying our customs? You are dressed like a peasant!"

"I must find that car!" he said urgently.

"The car went to the left, do you not see the dust?" she said calmly.

He peddled a few feet and turned. "Look, I'll return your bicycle, I promise you. Or come along if you doubt me, but I have to follow that car!"

"I will go with you," she said firmly.

They peddled together up the road to the left. Houses were set close together in a long row like small boxes; a rivulet of dirty water ran down one side of the road in a hollowed-out trough. The street turned at an angle, displaying another length of soiled houses and dirt road and Colin had to swerve to avoid a goat. A donkey brayed from under a dusty tree. Here and there sat worn men; there were no women to be seen. The houses thinned, and he saw no car but at the last house on the road—isolated and at some distance away—there still lingered a faint cloud of dust.

"They are in that last house," the girl said. "Why are they staying there? It has been unoccupied for years. Are you sure they're in there? I will wait while you go to the door."

Colin climbed down from his bike. "It's not that simple," he said, turning to look at her and discovered that it was a mistake to look at her a second time. His first impression had been of a slightly plump and rounded young woman with a bland and candy-box sort of prettiness. Between first and second glance all clichés had vanished: she was exquisitely lovely. Her face *did* belong on a candy box: one of those fragile old Victorian boxes that dripped paper lace. Her skin was flawless, her lips full, sensual and pink, her eyes huge, round, heavily lashed and a curious shade of vivid blue that by contrast brought to life the very ordinary shade of brown hair. He frankly stared. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Sabahat Pasha. What is yours?"

"Nazim Aziz," he said absently.

She laughed. "What? But you are not Turkish!"

He flushed. "Actually it's Colin Ramsey but—oh hang it all, do go now," he said, parking his bicycle against a crumbling wall. "I'm going to walk the rest of the way."

"Go?" she said, and laughed. "How can I ride two bicycles back to town? And why do you not ride up to the door and make sure your friends are there?"

"Damn," he said, and looked at her helplessly, at her wide naïve eyes,

and warm sympathetic mouth. How could he possibly explain the situation to her? It was impossible.

"Something is wrong," she said, watching him. "You are in some kind of trouble." The laughter had gone from her eyes, leaving them grave.

"Yes," he admitted. "But it's not a police matter," he added hastily. "They're all Americans, and calling the police would—well, prove very embarrassing."

"Americans!" she exclaimed. "Americans here in Yozgat? Oh but I would love to meet them! What brought them here to Yozgat? Are they also studying the customs?"

"We came to—" He stopped. With extraordinary clarity he suddenly remembered why they had come to Yozgat, and it occurred to him that help might be available after all. He said excitedly, "Sabahat, tell me. Are there gypsies camping in or near Yozgat?"

She looked startled and then thoughtful. "There were a number of them camped just outside of town for a few days. I know because they read the palms of many of my friends. But I hear they left yesterday, going south, and now there is only the man with the dancing bear."

"And is he a gypsy too?"

The girl laughed. "But of course—only the gypsies have dancing bears!" She looked at him, puzzled. "But he is very dirty, very soiled," she pointed out.

"Do you know where he stays?"

She nodded. "Beyond the mosque, on the road leaving town. I have seen his wagon. Also his dog." She shivered distastefully.

He said recklessly, "Please—if I ride the bicycle back to town with you, could you direct me to the road leading to the gypsy with the dancing bear?"

"You wish to *see* him?" she said in astonishment.

"I must."

She recoiled, obviously disturbed, and then she looked into his face and suddenly laughed. "Your moustache has slipped! It is crooked!"

He grinned. "I'm not surprised, the blasted thing itches, too." He felt for it with two fingers and began to peel it off, the girl watching gravely, as if the most important thing in the world at the moment was to learn how moustaches were removed.

But he had underestimated her intelligence, which had continued to assess and appraise him as they talked. She nodded suddenly, as if she had made up her mind. "Come—I will take you myself to the gypsy," she said. "You would not be able to speak to him if you found him, would you? I'm sure my friend won't mind if I borrow the bicycle a little while longer."

"I say —that's awfully kind of you," he said gratefully, and then he heard himself ask, "Your friend — is it a girl or a boy?"

She glanced over her shoulder at him with amusement. "It is my girlfriend."

Colin turned his bike around and followed her back down the road into town. When they reached the square the bus had finally departed and in its place stood a small dingy cardboard suitcase and a string bag. "Good grief —my cameras! And Magda's suitcase!" he gasped. He had forgotten all about them. He stowed them away on the back of the bicycle, and with Sabahat in the lead they set out to look for the gypsy.

The gypsy's cart stood at some distance from the road, half-hidden within a grove of scrub and stunted trees. His campfire burned in a circle of stones, guarded by an ugly, ferocious-looking dog. "He must be at home because the bear is tied up to the wagon," Sabahat said, and added nervously, "But the dog is not tied."

"I'll go first," Colin told her. "Stay well behind, until I can get him to tie the dog. If he's there."

They didn't need to shout; they had no sooner left the road than the dog sprang up, growling, snarling, barking, baring his teeth in a terrifying manner, and when this did not send Colin into retreat the dog flew toward him as if to devour him. Colin stood still, his heart hammering. The gypsy appeared suddenly from the woods and stood watching, saying nothing, his gaze hostile, arms folded.

"I must talk to you," Colin shouted. "Call off your dog, will you?"

Behind him Sabahat bravely translated, her voice quivering only a little.

The gypsy spoke to the dog and the dog slunk away, head down, eyes still on Colin. Colin and Sabahat wheeled their bicycles nearer.

"Be careful," Sabahat said in a low voice, "I am sure he would like to steal the bicycles — see how he looks at them! Gypsies will steal anything."

"You'll translate?"

She nodded, eyes huge.

"Tell him I come to Yozgat to find the gypsies who were here yesterday. Ask if he knows them."

Sabahat translated and the man shrugged and replied. "He says if you give him money he will tell you anything you wish to hear."

Colin said sharply, "I don't want him to tell me anything I wish to hear, I want the truth. I'm looking for a family of gypsies who were supposed to be here in Yozgat."

Sabahat and the gypsy exchanged words. "He says he wonders what you want of a gypsy family."

"I have a message from a friend of theirs."

"A friend of the *gypsies*?" faltered Sabahat.

"Yes. Tell him I come to Yozgat with that friend; she crossed the border into Turkey with them. Now she's in trouble and needs help."

The man's glance was sharp and inscrutable but when he had listened to Sabahat his face grew less closed. With much casualness he asked what the name of that lady might be who was a *gorgio* yet a friend of the Rom.

"Magda," said Colin, not daring to speak her well-publicized last name.

The man shrugged. He said he knew of no such person, nor anything of the gypsies who had been in this place.

"What you say is true?" whispered Sabahat.

Colin nodded. What could he produce to prove that he was speaking of Ferenci-Sabo, or had really known her? He suddenly remembered the passport photographs he had taken of Magda, and kneeling down beside the suitcase he burrowed through it. "Ah," he said triumphantly as he found two discarded pictures of Magda, and he carried one of them to the gypsy. "Magda," he said.

A flash of recognition lighted the man's eyes but as quickly as it arrived it was replaced by suspicion. Colin groaned. "Blast it, now he thinks I'm the police no doubt. Sabahat, I want you to tell him something very carefully, translating it for him sentence by sentence."

She nodded.

"Tell him Magda is in Yozgat. Tell him Magda was captured an hour ago. Abducted. Kidnapped."

Sabahat looked at him in astonishment. "Abducted?" she gasped.

"Please—tell him," Colin begged. "Tell him if he does not believe me then he can go and see for himself. You know the name of the street?" he asked Sabahat. "Tell him that, too. Tell him she is in an abandoned house, two men took her there."

The man's eyes had narrowed, and he looked at Colin so quickly that Colin wondered if the man did not know a little English after all. The man began to speak.

Sabahat said breathlessly, "He says the gypsies you look for left here late yesterday and began moving south on the road to Kayseri. And –" She gasped. "And he says he would like to see the house in Yozgat of which you speak."

Colin drew a sigh of relief. "Thank God—then he does know what I'm talking about!"

The gypsy began speaking again. "He asks you," said Sabahat, "to sit down with him on the steps of his caravan and tell him more clearly what has happened. He also wishes me to tell you that unfortunately he has no guns."

Colin said gravely, "Tell him I am a believer in nonviolence, anyway."

"Are you really?" cried Sabahat breathlessly. "Oh but so am I! So are all my friends here and at college," she said with shining eyes. "Tell me, have you experienced any—what are they called love-ins?"

Colin shook his head regretfully. "I'm sorry, no."

"You have spoken of such violent things abductions, kidnappings it is very difficult to imagine this. Who could do such a thing? Is it one of my own people who has done this to your friend?"

"Actually a Frenchman, I think," Colin said.

"So *many* foreigners in Yozgat?" she exclaimed. "Oh how my friends would love to know of this, you cannot imagine our hunger to speak to people from other lands. The summers in Yozgat are so very long, so very hot and tedious."

Colin abruptly halted on his way to the caravan. "How many friends have you in Yozgat?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Why, there are about twelve of us home from college." Her eyes suddenly slanted mischievously. "You are thinking of the same thing? You must be! I know you are!"

Colin looked at her and she looked at him, communication leaping between them. He thought he had never met anyone so perceptive unless it was his sister Mia.

The gypsy grunted he had been waiting patiently for them. He spoke in a rush of Turkish to Sabahat, who leaned forward courteously to listen. When he had finished she nodded and smiled at Colin. "It's all right he says he will trust you. He says he remained here, behind the others, to wait for the woman Magda and to guide her to the other gypsies. He says if you are the police then he will kill you with his knife. Otherwise he will help us."

"Us?" Colin said in surprise.

She smiled at him gravely. "If I abandon you now, how shall I ever learn if you succeed?"

Colin grinned. "Somewhere I've heard that before," he said dryly. "All right, let's make plans. This won't be easy but tell him I'm awfully glad to have him on my side."

"Me, too?" she asked boldly, her cheeks turning pink.

"You too," he said, smiling.

* * *

From where Colin and the gypsy crouched, the town seemed far away. They had crossed fields and then empty land to reach the shed behind the house in which Magda, Mrs. Pollifax and Sandor had been hidden. They had been taken here at twenty past one o'clock; it was now half-past three in the afternoon. Ahead of them nothing stirred, and they slipped around to the front of the shed and inside. The darkness of its interior was welcome. They had come to reconnoiter, to make certain that the three were still in the house.

The gypsy pointed to the car and Colin nodded. They crept from the shed across the barren yard to its shadows, where the gypsy unsheathed his long knife and slashed each tire. When he sheathed his knife again they moved to the wall of the house and sat down under one of the two shuttered windows, pressing their ears against the wall.

A moment later Colin was hearing Sandor's voice repeat over and over, *"Ikiyuzlu . . . Ikiyuzlu . . ."* It was a word Colin had heard his uncle use several times and so he was familiar with its meaning, which was hypocrite, or more literally, his uncle had explained, someone who wore two faces. Then Sandor abruptly said, *"Canavar . . ."* and was silent. He at least was still alive.

The gypsy had begun sitting back on his heels to stare at the wall above their heads, studying it fixedly with half-closed eyes, and now he astonished Colin by running his hands lightly over the surface. Colin saw that a seam ran up and then down the wall in the shape of a doorway that had some time ago been bricked-over, but clumsily. The gypsy's fingertips came together at one particular brick, he braced himself, leaned a little, and lifted the brick out with his hands. Just as quickly he put it back and turned to smile at Colin. It was a smile of infinite triumph and satisfaction. At once they both began to check the surface for other loosely mortared bricks, and together found a dozen, all in the area that had once been a door. Like all the houses in Anatolia, this one had been built as a child would build a house of blocks: by simply placing one row of sun-baked adobe bricks on top of the other without resorting to beams or joists, and then at a later date a thin veneer of cement or stucco had been added. The veneer had peeled away from most of this abandoned house, exposing the crumbling mortar; sun and wind had done the rest.

Having discovered the dozen bricks that were loose, the gypsy brought out a knife for each of them and without a word spoken they began to gently pry loose the mortar surrounding the other bricks. They worked for half an hour and then Colin glanced at his watch, touched the gypsy's arm and whispered, "Sabahat."

The man nodded, signaled that he would remain, and Colin crept away to hurry back into town and meet Sabahat.

After waiting fifteen minutes for Sabahat, Colin grew restless. She had instructed him to wait in the cafe, where he would be less vulnerable to curious passersby; on the other hand she had also pointed out that women never entered cafes in Anatolia, and so he must watch the window—grimy and fly-specked—for her face and her signal. He was reduced to sitting on a bench near the door and nervously fingering the identity card in his pocket and then his reapplied moustache.

The men seated around him in the cafe looked as if they had been turned into stone fifty years ago—he swore none of them had moved since he entered except the two men playing chess in the corner; twice they had reached forward to move a chesspiece. The others remained oblivious: unblinking, lips closed around hubble-bubble pipes, eyes blank. Colin felt he might have stumbled blindly into an opium den.

Two more men entered the cafe, followed by a third, and in fascination Colin watched to see how they would distribute themselves. The first to enter neither nodded nor spoke but moved to a corner and joined the silent ones. The second sat down and spread out a newspaper. The third said in a clear voice, "*Raki*," and turned to survey the room.

Colin gasped. The man who had just violated the silence was his uncle Hu. There he stood in his usual faded blue work shirt and khaki shorts, looking around him for a face that interested him, his streaked hair and moustache bleached a shade closer to white after a week in the sun. Colin's first instinct was to dive under a table and hide, and then he remembered that he was in disguise. He met his uncle's gaze without flinching.

But this time he should have hidden. His uncle's trained photographer's eye slid over him, looked away and then slid back. A moment later, glass of raki in hand, Uncle Hu strolled over and sat down at the table nearest Colin.

From the corner of his mouth, very pleasantly, he said, "Do you mind telling me what the devil you're doing here in Yozgat in that absurd moustache?"

Colin froze. He wished desperately he knew Turkish well enough so that he could get up, mutter something appropriate to an Anatolian peasant, and stalk away insulted.

"Of course I don't mean to trespass," his uncle continued in a mild voice, "but I have just spent one of the most horrible nights of my life in the local jail here. It seems that anyone driving a Ramsey Enterprises vehicle is being stopped by the police, searched and detained while the

Istanbul police are consulted. I have been released—at last—because I don't answer to the description of the young sandy-haired chap they're looking for, who is traveling in the company of a woman wanted for questioning in some fiendish murder in Istanbul."

Colin said despairingly, "Let's go outside."

"Delighted," said his uncle. "I wondered at the time why I chose such a gloomy place to celebrate the end of my incarceration."

The sunlight was almost blinding. "How did you recognize me?" asked Colin miserably.

His uncle said witheringly, "My dear chap, you're my nephew. Oh, don't look so worried, I can't imagine anyone else recognizing you. I have a remarkable memory for faces, you know. When I saw you I thought, 'Those are Colin's cheekbones and eyes, in fact that looks precisely like Colin in peasant clothes and moustache.' And then considering the circumstances, which have been somewhat jarring—I thought, 'Why *not* Colin in peasant clothes and moustache?' Now for heaven's sake tell me what the hell you've been up to while I've been in Erzurum. I don't mean to mix my metaphors—"

That was his uncle, thought Colin, concerned over metaphors in the midst of a trying situation. "Yes, sir," he said as they sat down on the bench outside the cafe. "Well, you see it's this way, sir and I'll have to talk quickly three friends of mine have been kidnapped here in Yozgat and are in a house about a mile away."

"I see," said his uncle. "Well, of course then you've got to get them out," he said without so much as a blink of the eye.

"Yes, sir," Colin agreed with a faint smile.

"One of these er, friends is the alleged murderess the police are looking for?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir—but she didn't murder anyone, Uncle Hu. I was with her when Henry's body was left in the studio—your studio -" He stopped. He could not think of any possible way to explain the events of the past two days to his uncle. "It's all quite complicated," he added weakly. "Can't you just pretend you didn't see me and go on to Istanbul?"

His uncle considered this. "I could," he said reflectively, "but not without hearing your plans first. You have made plans, haven't you?" he said sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Stop sir-ing me, I'm not your father." He frowned. "The thing is, I won't have you going to jail—horrid places, Turkish jails. I could volunteer. I'm not without experience in this kind of rescue operation—I was in the war, you know, and God knows these jails are to be avoided, your mother would never forgive me if—"

At that moment Sabahat hurried around the corner, gave a cry of relief at seeing him, and cried breathlessly, "We're ready—it's all settled! Yozgat's leading poet is going to read a poem of welcome the same one he made up for the Premier's visit two years ago! and the Greek Orthodox priest is going to say a prayer!"

"Poets? Priests?" said Uncle Hu with interest. He looked appreciatively at Sabahat and then at Colin. "I say you do seem to be managing something rather well, do you mind terribly if I come along, too?"

CHAPTER 13

MRS. POLLIFAX SIGHED AND OPENED HER EYES.

She had fallen or been pushed to the floor, still tied to the chair, so that her cheek rested on the hard earthern floor and any spontaneous movement was impossible. She heard Sandor say in a loud voice, "*Canavar* . . ." and she knew that something had happened to awaken her but she did not know what. From the other room—the door was open—she heard Dr. Belleaux say in a low voice, "Bring the serum out anyway. We'll have to risk its killing her, there's no other way . . ."

"*Magda,*" said Mrs. Pollifax in what she believed to be a loud clear voice, but realized a second later was only a whisper. She could not see Magda from where she lay—it must be Magda they had taken into the other room. She could see Sandor's feet not far away, the toes springing from his torn sneakers, but she could not see any more of him without lifting her head, and her head was on fire with a ribbon of pain that moved from cheekbone to brain. Concussion, she thought drowsily; could cheekbones have concussion? and then she drifted off again into unconsciousness.

When she next opened her eyes it was with the impression that she was in danger of being attacked by rats. She realized that she had been dreaming of rats gnawing their way through the wall, and for a moment, awakening, she thought she might still be within her nightmare because she distinctly heard rustling noises in the wall. *But that is definitely a rat in the wall*, she thought, listening. *I'm not losing my mind after all. I've regained consciousness!* There was not a great deal of reassurance in this thought because her circumstances had not changed. She remained huddled on the floor in the semi-darkness, her cheek pressed to the earth, the murmur of voices ebbing and rising from the other room. But she discovered that she was feeling better: still stiff and bruised but no

longer aflame. She knew that it was blood she could taste when she licked her lips, and her nose ached, but it no longer throbbed, and the ribbon of pain had vanished. She dared to hope that no bones had been broken.

The voices from the other room were audible and she tried to make sense of them but she was still too blurred. She heard ". . . having gone to Bulgaria to help with security arrangements for the Festival of Youth . . ." and then, "You had intended from the first to go to the British Consulate in Istanbul?"

"Not alone, no . . ." That was Magda's voice, oddly toneless. "But I had not expected to be looked for so quick or so—so accurately. I could not make trouble for my gypsy friends."

Gypsies, thought Mrs. Pollifax, frowning. Surely Magda ought not to be speaking about gypsies to Dr. Belleaux? She wondered what time it was, and as she licked her dry lips she wondered if she might call out for water. She felt very tired and dull. She tried to focus her eyes on Sandor's disreputable sneakers and then she tried to practice thinking very carefully. She supposed it was Thursday -no, no, it must still be Wednesday, late afternoon or early evening of their arrival day in Yozgat, and Dr. Belleaux had promised that presently they would be shot and carried off in the black car to an archaeological dig. That was not a very pleasant thought. She wondered if her body would ever be found and identified. Perhaps it was better if it wasn't, she reflected, since it would only prove extremely embarrassing to Mr. Carstairs and then of course there were her children. They were very nice children, Roger and Jane, but they would simply not understand how their mother came to be murdered in Turkey disguised as a native peasant woman. Nor would she be there to soften the explanation that between Garden Club meetings and her hospital work she had acquired this interesting little sideline as a CIA courier. It was not the sort of thing one could explain, certainly not to Jane at least.

But as her sluggishness diminished Mrs. Pollifax remembered that there was even more to be concerned about: there was Dr. Belleaux. The thought of Carstairs continuing to trust the man so appalled her that it jerked her to full consciousness at last, and in time to hear Dr. Belleaux say quite clearly, "You have been described as a defecting Communist agent, Madame Ferenci-Sabo. You are known to the Russians in this manner, too. But actually you have worked for the Americans all these years, is this not true?"

Mrs. Pollifax gasped, terrifyingly alert at last. It must have been drugs they had administered to Magda to force her to speak. Words overheard earlier came back to her . . . *we'll have to risk its killing her,*

there's no other way . . . Not an ordinary drug then, but one of the truth serums.

No no no, she screamed, but no sound came from her throat and it was part of this nightmare that she could move her lips and her tongue yet make no sound. She began to struggle against the ropes that held her bound, frustrated by her helplessness to halt or delay Magda's confession to being a double agent.

"Yes, that is true," Magda said in reply, still in that cold, toneless voice. "I have been—am—a counteragent."

As Mrs. Pollifax sagged defeatedly she caught a glimpse of Sandor now, his head turned to listen. She noted the welt across his cheekbone and the gag stuffed into his mouth –he must have gone on shouting—and she thought, *Now he knows what Magda is, too.*

"I see," Dr. Belleaux said, and his voice shook a little, betraying his excitement at discovering that his wild suspicion was a literal fact. He drew a sharp breath and when he spoke again there was barely suppressed triumph in his voice, as if he knew he stumbled upon a masquerade so outrageous and so sinister that its ramifications would be felt everywhere—and especially on his own career, thought Mrs. Pollifax bitterly.

"Please tell me next how you notified the Americans after your extraordinary escape from my two men."

"I took money. Stefan had left some on the table, Turkish lira, and I took it. One of the gypsies in Istanbul sent a cable for me."

"And the address to which you sent it?"

Magda recited a cover address in Baltimore.

"Thank you!" said Dr. Belleaux cheerfully. "Thank you very much. Now I would like to discuss with you where you have hidden the missing document, the top secret paper you brought out of Russia with "

He stopped abruptly. Mrs. Pollifax had heard it, too, an indefinable sound of movement outside, of something brushing the front door. Now she realized it had been a knock; it was repeated.

"What the devil!" exclaimed Dr. Belleaux. "Stefan!"

"*Evet*," said Stefan calmly. "It is only a young girl, I saw her come. She has a notebook and pencil."

"She will have heard voices. Answer and get rid of her. Assim, hide the hypodermic. Cover the woman so she looks ill."

Mrs. Pollifax had been holding her breath. Now she expelled it and cleared her throat, testing it to see if her voice worked yet. If she could only scream Practicing, she said in a small, hoarse voice, "Someone—is—at—the—door."

She at least captured Sandor's attention; he made a frustrated rum-

bling noise in his throat and she saw him strain at his ropes. Stefan was unbolting and opening the front door. Mrs. Pollifax heard a clear young voice speak with a rush of enthusiasm and charm. But the words were Turkish she had forgotten they would be. Mrs. Pollifax formed a scream in her throat. "Help!" she called out raspily. "Help! Help!"

Dr. Belleaux murmured something in Turkish in an amused voice, gave a little laugh and crossed the floor to close the door between the two rooms. With this act he blotted them out with finality.

Tears came to Mrs. Pollifax's eyes. "I'm sorry, Sandor," she said. "I would have liked to really scream but it's my voice. I can't."

Sandor rumbled again in reply. "I'm sorry you've been hurt and tied up and gagged," she told him, because it was important to practice speaking in case a second opportunity arose. "I'm sure you must be extremely sorry you ever joined us, but you must have overheard enough to realize this is something more important than any of us individually. It's the only attitude I can suggest," she added primly. The tears had run down her face to mingle with the dried blood on her cheeks. "I can only tell you—oh that rat in the wall is annoying," she cried furiously. "It's not enough that we're surrounded by human rats, there has to be " She turned her head toward the outside wall.

Her gasp was almost as audible as her attempt to scream, for the wall was literally disappearing before her eyes. Sunshine was entering the dark room, inch by inch, as brick after brick was tidily, efficiently and very hastily removed by a pair of large brown human hands. Mrs. Pollifax could not believe it: either her vision or her mind had been seriously affected and she was hallucinating. Within seconds a space appeared large enough for a pair of shoulders, and at once a pair of shoulders blocked off the light that had bruised and stabbed her swollen eyes. The words that slipped from Mrs. Pollifax's lips were entirely unpremeditated; she said incredulously, "Wotthehell!"

It had the effect of turning Sandor's head immediately, and as he saw the light, the opening, and the man's head his eyes widened in shock. Clearly he saw it too, and she was not hallucinating at all. The man's shoulders cleared the opening and he lifted his head. Mrs. Pollifax had never seen him before; his face was dark, tough, crafty. He lifted a finger to his lips, and after pulling his legs through the hole he tiptoed across the room. He was followed by a second man, and he too was a stranger to Mrs. Pollifax, so that she became certain that she must have lost consciousness again and was dreaming some happy, wishful fantasy of rescue.

The second man was tall, lanky and dusty. As if by pre-arrangement he went to Sandor. Neither man expected them to be capable of walk-

ing. Ropes were quickly slashed. Smoothly Mrs. Pollifax was picked up, carried to the opening in the wall and tilted forward on her knees. Hands reached in from outside and gently grasped Mrs. Pollifax's bleeding fingers. She was half-pushed and half-pulled through the aperture into the blinding brilliant sun of a late afternoon that contained of all things - a smiling Colin Ramsey.

"Colin!" she gasped.

"Yes," he said, grinning. "Isn't it wonderful?" As Sandor was pushed out into the sunshine Colin raised both arms and waved at someone she could not see. The tall, sandy-haired man followed Sandor out of the hole and the dark, fierce-looking one began swiftly replacing the bricks.

"You'll have to walk several yards before you can rest," Colin said firmly. "We have to get you to the front corner of the house, and we have only three minutes to do it."

She understood nothing of this except that it was obviously not a dream, and that it was being managed with infinite precision so that she need to do nothing at all. Nothing except walk, which was nearly impossible, but if Colin said it had to be done she would do it. Her feet felt like stumps, bloodless and lifeless, and her knees kept betraying her. Colin supported her, and the sandy-haired man supported Sandor, and slowly they reached the cover of a bedraggled grapevine at the corner of the house. Here the third man caught up with them and crouched down behind them as they waited.

A van drove slowly up the empty street. *Colin's van?* thought Mrs. Pollifax, bewildered, but that had been abandoned in Ankara. The van pulled up in front of the house. Half a dozen young people in western clothes leaped down from the rear and began unloading it couldn't be possible—trays of fruit and food, jugs of water and huge armfuls of bright flowers. A man in the robes of a priest climbed down from the driver's seat and joined them; Mrs. Pollifax saw that they were going to walk up to the house in which she had been captive.

"Oh, stop them!" she whispered, and then, "Magda's in there!"

"We know that," Colin said calmly. "Sabahat knocked at the door a few minutes ago saying she was taking a census. She reported three men and an invalid woman in the front room."

"Sabahat? Census?" repeated Mrs. Pollifax dazedly.

"Now," Colin said to the sandy-haired man. The stranger nodded and walked down to the empty van and backed it up the cart track to Mrs. Pollifax and Sandor. "Get in quickly," Colin told her.

They fell clumsily into the rear, and then the van backed down into the street, this time pointing toward town, the motor kept running by the tall stranger. Colin and the dark gypsy-looking man moved toward the

house, and incredulously Mrs. Pollifax leaned out to watch. The young people and the priest had absolutely vanished into the house, realized Mrs. Pollifax disbelievingly—leaving the door wide open. Inside, it looked as if a party was in full bloom—and into this melee walked Colin and the gypsy.

A moment later they backed out carrying an unconscious Magda between them. A girl joined them, laughing and calling over her shoulder to the young people behind her. For one incredible moment Mrs. Pollifax saw Dr. Belleaux swim to the door like a salmon fighting his way upstream. A crowd of laughing youngsters accosted him and pulled him back. Furious, he stretched out his two hands toward Magda, face livid, and then someone placed a plate of grapes in those outstretched hands, a garland of flowers was lowered over his head and slowly he was sucked back into the livingroom, overwhelmed by currents too strong for him.

"What on earth—!" cried Mrs. Pollifax to Colin as the two men placed Magda in the rear of the van.

Colin grinned. "It's a love-in. Dr. Belleaux is being smothered with non-violence." He turned and grinned at the girl. "This is Sabahat, whose idea it was—Sabahat Pasha. Sabahat, ask Sebastien to sit up front and take us to the gypsies now, will you?"

"How do you do," Sabahat said, smiling at Mrs. Pollifax. "I'm so glad you are safe." She spoke to the gypsy in Turkish and then extended her hand to Colin. "I will make certain the three men do not get away for as long as is possible. I cannot promise much but it may help you a little," she told him gravely. "*Allaha ismarladik*, Colin Ramsey."

He shook his head. "Not for long, Sabahat," he said, firmly holding on to her hand, "You know I'll be back. In the meantime how can I thank you?"

She dimpled charmingly. "But my friends have always wished to meet such a scholar as Dr. Belleaux—there is no need to explain the situation to them. You are giving them a big day, and it is I who should thank you!"

He grinned. "Fair exchange then." He released her hand and shouted, "Okay, Uncle Hu, let's go!"

As the van roared into life and raced down the street Mrs. Pollifax exclaimed, "Did you call that man *Uncle Hu*?"

"Quite a lot has happened," Colin said modestly. "Yes, that's Uncle Hu. Letting him help seemed the least I could do, he's already spent one night in jail because of us, which places him beyond the pale. This is the van he drives—he was on his way back from Erzurum. The chap with him is a gypsy named Sebastien. I picked him up before I ran into Un-

cle Hu, he has a dancing bear and he stayed behind the other gypsies to wait for Magda."

Mrs. Pollifax looked at him in amazement. "Colin," she said, "you're an extraordinary young man."

He returned her glance, looked startled, and then a slow smile spread across his face. "Yes," he said with an air of discovery. "I believe I am."

CHAPTER 14

THEIR PRECIPITOUS FLIGHT FROM YOZGAT WAS INTERRUPTED BY Sebastien, who somewhat desperately reminded them that he had a horse, a dog, a wagon and a dancing bear to be retrieved. Colin crawled up front to the window and held a three-way conversation, the translations supplied by his uncle, but he crawled back to report that Sebastien was adamant: he could not go any further without his menage. They stopped briefly beside the road at the place where the gypsy had made camp; Sebastien looked for several moments at Uncle Hu's map, then marked a cross on the road, halfway between Yozgat and Kayseri.

Uncle Hu said, "He tells me the gypsies will be somewhere near the cross he's marked, and camping within sight of the road because they expect him to follow."

"And will he follow?"

"He'll hope to catch up with us by dawn."

They thanked Sebastien profusely for his help, Mrs. Pollifax gave him money from the wad pinned inside her baggy pants, and they resumed their breakneck trip south. Watching Mrs. Pollifax return the bills to their hiding place Sandor said with a weak grin, "The Bank of Pollifax, eh?"

"Hold still," Colin told him sharply, trying to wrap gauze around Sandor's bleeding wrists. "Uncle Hu always drives like this," he explained resignedly, "although I rather imagine he's trying to cover as much ground as possible before dark. You've no idea how black it gets out here on the plateau."

"No street lights," said Mrs. Pollifax brightly. "What time is it now?"

"Nearly eight. One hour until dark. There," he said, tying the last knot on Sandor's bandage and turning to Mrs. Pollifax. "Hold out your wrists. I do hope you've had tetanus shots recently, they're a pulpy mess."

"Shouldn't you do Magda's first?"

He laughed shortly. "Why? She has an advantage over you, she's unconscious. But her wrists aren't in such bad shape, they must have been untied when they drugged her." He looked soberly at Mrs. Pollifax and said, "By the way, I think it's time I ask how much Dr. Belleaux found out while he held you three captive."

Mrs. Pollifax sighed. "Nearly everything."

"Good God!"

She nodded. "This time they gave Magda a different sort of drug. They tried first to make her talk without it, but she wouldn't." To Sandor she said frankly, "You know who she is now, too."

He dropped his eyes. *"Evet."*

"But does Dr. Belleaux know about the *gypsies*?" Colin asked. When Mrs. Pollifax nodded he shook his head. "What a foul piece of luck! That means he knows precisely where we're heading, or soon will. Everyone in Yozgat can tell him the gypsies have gone south."

Mrs. Pollifax felt it unnecessary to reply. The fresh air that had revived her was beginning to stupefy her now, and the wonder of being rescued was being replaced by fresh worries. She felt very weak, and a little nauseous—a reasonable reaction to what she had gone through but still inconvenient. If choice were given her she would without hesitation choose a hospital—even a nursing home would do, she thought wistfully—where she could bleed quietly between clean sheets, rouse only to sip nourishing liquids and to observe new ice packs being placed on bruises and swellings before drifting off into an exhausted sleep. Instead she was rocketing off across the bumpy Anatolian plain again, in a rather dirty van, while she sat on an extremely dirty floor holding on for dear life and adjusting to the realization that they were still in danger, and probably greater danger now because Dr. Belleaux knew everything about them.

Aloud she said, "Dr. Belleaux is going to be feeling very nasty, I think—he's just lost that elegant Istanbul life of his that he planned to get back to tomorrow, after burying us in some ruins."

"He almost did bury us," growled Sandor.

Mrs. Pollifax considered this and nodded. Yes, there was a great deal to be said for such an attitude: without Colin they would be dead now, in which case there would be no choice left them at all. *I'll feel sorry for myself later*, decided Mrs. Pollifax, and firmly put aside thoughts of rest to take charge again. "What weapons do we have, Colin?"

He looked amused. "You've gone professional again—I'm relieved. I still have Stefan's pistol, with three shots fired."

"They did not search me," Sandor said, bringing out the gun he had periodically waved at them. "But wotthehell, it's empty," he added sadly.

"Uncle Hu may have something," Colin said. "Of course he may no longer carry a gun because he's never been attacked on these trips by anything more than a goat. If he ever slows down I'll ask him."

But his uncle Hu gave no sign of slowing down, in fact as the road grew more atrocious his speed seemed to increase, as if he regarded the stones and gullies and potholes as an affront to an unblemished record. Magda had been rolled into a rug and braced against one wall; she was almost to be envied. If this was Wednesday, thought Mrs. Pollifax nostalgically—and she thought it was—she would be wheeling the hospital's bookcart at home, and tomorrow she would normally be having her karate lessons with Lorvale.

Except what was normalcy, she wondered; in Mr. Carstairs' world she was not even overdue yet, and certainly he had no idea that in cabling Dr. Belleaux her identity and description he had signed her death warrant for so long as she was in this country and at the mercy of Dr. Belleaux's considerable resources. She was neatly trapped indeed. Each new detail that Dr. Belleaux learned only inflamed his desperation as well as his ambitions: *he must* find them. They could escape him for the moment by going to the Turkish police and appealing for help, but this would at once cancel all hope of Magda fleeing the country; she would again become public property to be schemed over, fought over, questioned, requestioned and exploited. But even worse, Mrs. Pollifax suspected that by surrendering to the police they would become sitting targets for Dr. Belleaux instead of moving ones. It would take time and patience for their shocking charges against Dr. Belleaux to be investigated and proven, and while facts were checked they would be confined to some small area accessible only to the police, many of whom had already been charmed by that genius of criminology Dr. Belleaux. What would the headlines be then, she wondered: Mysterious Explosion Wipes Out Political Prisoners? or Fire Sweeps Wing of Prison, Five Dead? It was too risky to contemplate.

In any case, without passport and wanted for Henry's murder, Mrs. Pollifax could certainly not leave the country herself now. Her hopes had to be concentrated exclusively on Magda. If Magda could somehow be spirited beyond the border then she at least would be free—and she could communicate with Carstairs . . .

She said, "How far are we from the nearest border, Colin?"

"Which one?"

"Any—except Russian," she amended.

Sandor answered. "From Greece about two hundred and fifty kilometers. From Syria maybe three hundred."

Mrs. Pollifax shook her head. "Too far. Where is the nearest airport then?"

Colin looked at her in dismay. "I believe there's one at Kayseri, about fifty miles south of us. But surely—"

"Do you think they'd dream of our risking an airport?"

Colin said, "No. Yes. Oh I don't know!"

She pointed out gently, "Every day that goes by will give Dr. Belleaux a better chance to find us. It's Time that's our worst enemy, but if we move boldly—"

Sandor turned and looked at her with interest.

"But that's such a reckless *gamble*," protested Colin. "What if it shouldn't work?"

Sandor grinned. "She's okay—she's got the crazy spirit. Except wotthehell I never expect it from such a person." He looked at Mrs. Pollifax appreciatively and his grin deepened.

Abruptly the van began a wild braking, jumped and came to a grinding halt. Uncle Hu slid open the window that in this van separated the cab from the rear. "Radiator," he said, gesturing ahead.

Thick clouds of vapor curled up from the hood of the van, obscuring the road. "She's boiled dry," he added unnecessarily.

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Pollifax, and she too crawled to the door of the van to follow Colin and Sandor outside.

"It will take time, maybe half an hour," Ramsey said, meeting them there. "Can't put cold water into a hot radiator or she'll crack, you know." He disappeared into the van and handed out sterno, pans and water jug. "Set it up, Colin," he said. Nodding pleasantly at Mrs. Pollifax he held out his hand. "How do you do. Hugh Ramsey's the name."

"Emily Pollifax," she said briskly, shaking his hand.

"That woman in there who was drugged she hurt, too?"

"Bruised mainly. Still unconscious."

"Might as well leave her inside then. Turkish?"

"Uh—" Mrs. Pollifax opened her mouth and then closed it. "European," she said weakly.

Ramsey nodded and began pouring water carefully into two pans. "Damn nuisance, this," he said in his mild voice.

Colin drew out his gun. "I'll take a look at the road behind us," he said, and moved off toward a cluster of rocks and disappeared, soon to appear on top of the largest one. "No one on the road for miles," he called. "Where are we, Uncle Hu?"

His uncle shouted back, "We passed through Osmanpasa and crossed

Kizil Irmak. Must be about forty miles out of Yozgat, sixty from Kayseri."

Mrs. Pollifax was looking at the sun that hung suspended over the range in the south, possibly the same mountain range she had seen from Ankara the evening before. A curious lavender and gold light bathed the wild land around them, the beginnings of a dusk that would suddenly terminate in darkness. They could ill afford this stop, she thought, and hoped the gypsies were not far ahead. "Do you see any signs of a gypsy camp?" she called to Colin.

He turned and looked in the other direction. "No."

The first two pans of water were boiling. Ramsey and Sandor carried them carefully to the front of the van, opened the hood and the radiator, and poured the hot water inside. Ramsey put his ear to the radiator. "So far so good," he said, returning to pour more water. "Drink some while we have it," he told Mrs. Pollifax, handing her a cup.

"Do *you* know about an airport at Kayseri?" she asked him hopefully.

"Oh yes, there's an aerodrome there. They've limited service, but in summer there are several flights a week to Ankara and Istanbul."

Colin had climbed down for a drink of water and he joined them now, explaining, "Mrs. Pollifax is determined to get our passenger"—he jerked his head toward the van, "moving toward England."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pollifax firmly, and asked, "Is it true—absolutely true—that if we succeeded in getting her to Kayseri she would show her passport there, but *only* there, no matter how many changes she made en route out of the country?"

Both Colin and his uncle nodded. "Quite right," Ramsey said. "She'd go through Passport Control and Customs at Kayseri, but at Istanbul she'd be considered *In Transit* and would be issued an In Transit card during her wait in the air terminal. This she'd give up as she boarded her plane for London or Paris or whatever."

Mrs. Pollifax's interest increased. This was it, of course—if it could be done. If they could get Magda to Kayseri. If she could walk through Customs without being challenged and stopped. There would be that one terrifying moment of inspection, but if she passed . . .

Watching her Colin said indignantly, "Mrs. Pollifax, you don't even know the plane schedules!"

His uncle Hu startled them both by saying, "I've got one in the van. I try to keep very up-to-date on plane, train and boat schedules, especially in summer when everything opens up in this part of the country. The water's hot—pour it in, will you? I'll go and look."

A fresh batch of water was on the fire when he returned carrying a shoebox stuffed with folders. "I've got it," he said, waving one. "It's the

Van-Istanbul flight, Turkish airlines. Three days a week, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays departing Kayseri eight o'clock in the morning and arriving in Istanbul at eleven, with an asterisk denoting that this plane makes connections with the noon flights to Paris and London."

"Well!" said Mrs. Pollifax, delighted. "I believe I'll go inside and see if Magda's stirring yet."

"Take her some water," Colin suggested.

"You'll need a flashlight inside," contributed Ramsey, and crawled in ahead of her. Colin and Sandor followed and they all surrounded Magda, who remained inert.

Mrs. Pollifax felt her pulse. "She seems all right," she said doubtfully. "She just doesn't wake up."

Colin said peevishly, "How you can even think of her taking a *plane* in a day or two!"

Uncle Hu said firmly, "If she can swallow water we must give her some before she becomes dehydrated. I'll hold her up. Give me the cup of water, and Colin shine the flashlight on her face."

Magda was lifted, still encased in her rug and still inert. The flashlight was turned on and Uncle Hu leaned over Magda with the cup.

The cup suddenly slipped from his fingers to the floor.

"What is it?" gasped Mrs. Pollifax, who could see Ramsey's face. "Colin, he's ill—do something!"

Uncle Hu shook his head; his face was white. "*Who is this woman?*" he demanded in a shaken voice.

"It's Magda," said Mrs. Pollifax, regarding him with astonishment. "We're taking her to the gypsies."

He shook his head violently. "Where did you find her? Where does she come from?"

They stared at him stupidly.

His voice rose. "Don't you understand I know this woman? She was supposed to have died in Buchenwald twenty-six years ago!"

Mrs. Pollifax said blankly, "Magda?"

"Not Magda!" He leaned forward and peered into the flashlit face. "I tell you she's Alice. Alice Blanche."

Something stirred in Mrs. Pollifax's jaded mind; a face, a recognition, a memory. Alice Blanche . . . but Blanche meant white in French, didn't it? Alice White—Alice Dexter White. . . . "You know her?" she faltered.

He nodded. "During World War Two, when I escaped from prison camp. She hid me for three months in Paris occupied Paris. She—I " He hesitated and then said simply, "She was very beautiful and very brave. Reckless, really. I thought she was captured and imprisoned.

Charles said so. The Hawk said so. Red Queen said so. You must think I'm talking absolute gibberish," he said, looking up at Mrs. Pollifax. "She was an agent, you see."

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. She said quietly, "She still is. That's why you never found her."

He said in an appalled voice, "You can't be serious."

"I'm very serious. Surely you're aware that you've just helped rescue some rather controversial people from a house in Yozgat, and that we may be pursued even now?"

"Yes, but it's you, isn't it? Surely it's you who—"

Mrs. Pollifax said briskly, "Only superficially. It's this woman they're really after, and it's this woman we must get to Kayseri for a plane out of this country. If you've had time for newspapers on your trip you may have read about a certain Magda Ferenci-Sabo."

He nodded. "Yes, that defecting Communist agent."

Mrs. Pollifax glanced down at the still-unconscious Magda and said with a sigh, "Meet your defecting Communist, Mr. Ramsey. Now we really must leave before it grows any darker or we'll never find the gypsies. Is there enough water in the radiator now, Mr. Ramsey?"

"Yes," said Ramsey, still staring at Magda. "Good God!" he exclaimed again, incredulously, but he turned off the flashlight and followed them out without delay. They poured the last of the boiling water into the radiator. The sun had set with finality while they were inside the van, and twilight was rapidly replacing the long shadows. It would be dark in a matter of minutes.

Darkness came, and nothing existed for them except the twin beams of the van's headlights on the stony road ahead. Yet lacking darkness Mrs. Pollifax realized they would never have seen the gypsy camp, for it was the light of the campfire that drew their eyes: like an earthbound star it shone at some distance off the main road, made luminous by the opaque blackness surrounding it. Seeing it, Colin's uncle turned off the road and they bumped and jolted over a cart track of eroded earth and scrub.

"More dogs," groaned Colin as there mingled with the roar of the van the sound of howling cur dogs.

"Never mind, these are Magda's gypsies," Mrs. Pollifax told him warmly. "We've found them." Peering out she saw that there were two fires, one at either end of a camp laid out in a rectangle among rocks and a few stunted trees. Six or eight wagons had been drawn up to this rectangle, and Colin's uncle drove neatly into the middle before he brought the van to a halt.

"We're here," he shouted over his shoulder.

"Yes," said Mrs. Pollifax gratefully, and opened the rear door and stepped down.

Gypsies had appeared like shadows and formed a ring around the van. "Good evening," said Mrs. Pollifax eagerly. "We've brought you Magda, we're looking for—"

She stopped uncertainly. She realized that the gypsies formed a solid circle around her of folded arms, grim eyes and hostile faces. Not one of them moved but their eyes almost physically forced her to step back in retreat. For one nightmare moment Mrs. Pollifax wondered if they were going to stone her to death. She had never met with such an impenetrable wall of hatred. Something was terribly wrong.

Then from the shadows a voice said, "Good evening, Mrs. Pollifax!"

Dr. Belleaux strolled smiling into the circle of light followed by Stefan and Assim. "You musn't expect a welcome here, Mrs. Pollifax. I arrived twenty minutes ago by helicopter and warned these people about you." He said softly, with a helpless shrug, "They already know that you've hidden Magda in the van, and that you've beaten and drugged her. I've told them they mustn't kill you but they are so very aroused, what is one to do?"

CHAPTER 15

FOR A MOMENT MRS. POLLIFAX THOUGHT SHE WAS GOING TO FAINT but that would have been too merciful; she did not faint. He had said what, *helicopter*? It smacked more of black magic against this wild, primitive backdrop of sky and stars and earth lighted by campfires. "It's not true!" she flung at the gypsies and looked into their high-cheekboned, mahogany faces but her glance met no response. The frozen mute hostility did not waver; she felt whipped and shriveled by their bitter and accusing eyes.

"He lies!" she protested. "You mustn't believe him! We're Magda's friends!"

Behind her Colin said in a shaken voice, "I don't think they speak any English, Mrs. Pollifax."

"Not at all?" she cried passionately. She swung around. "They must know Turkish then! Sandor—Mr. Ramsey—translate, tell them quickly!"

"Good God, yes," murmured Uncle Hu, and stepped forward. He began to speak Turkish, and had produced several sentences when Stefan calmly walked up to him and hit him with his fist, sending him unconscious to the ground. At the same moment Mrs. Pollifax heard a startled grunt from Sandor on her right—he ducked his head and ran.

The wall of gypsies shattered. With shouts the men took off after Sandor into the darkness while the women tightened the circle around Mrs. Pollifax, presumably to prevent her bolting too. "No no no!" cried Mrs. Pollifax, impatiently stamping her foot. "Do understand! Magda is our friend, that man lies!"

One of the women spat contemptuously.

"Inglis," said Mrs. Pollifax in case her baggy pants and shawls confused them. "You must listen to me! We're all in danger from that man!"

Half a dozen women climbed into the rear of the van. There were murmurs and gasps at the sight of Magda, and then little crooning sounds as she was lifted and brought out. Gently they carried her toward the more distant campfire, with Dr. Belleaux following and speaking to them, obviously pointing out each bruise and cut to them in an effort to whip them into a new fury of hatred.

Mrs. Pollifax looked at Stefan, who looked at her mockingly. She turned and looked at Colin, who was leaning over his uncle. She wondered if Sandor had been caught yet. She wondered how she could possibly make the gypsies understand that if they didn't act quickly they would all be killed, and their beloved Magda too. She wondered how long it would be before Magda regained consciousness. That was something only Dr. Belleaux knew, and he seemed very confident that Magda's ability to speak was not an imminent threat.

He was shouting to Stefan now, and to complete the irony he was shouting in English. "Tie them up," he called. "We can use the helicopter radio to contact the police. They can be here by dawn."

Police—dawn; what was he planning, she wondered as Stefan pushed them forward. Could Dr. Belleaux really afford to call in the police, or didn't he plan to be here when they came, or would they all be dead when the police arrived? Certainly by dawn he must expect to retrieve whatever document Magda had stolen from the Communists; if he already had this he would not be here. Now that he had established himself to the gypsies as Magda's protector was he counting on this to provide him with the gypsies' confidence? She was growing too tired to think.

Stefan led them past the second campfire where Magda had been placed between blankets. A dark, tousle-headed boy of nine or ten sat cross-legged beside Magda, watching a woman apply ointment to Magda's face wounds. The woman looked up at Mrs. Pollifax as she passed and hissed, *"Baulo-moosh!"* Clearly it was an epithet of the worst kind.

At some distance from the fires their bandaged hands were tied behind them again, and then to the trunk of a stunted, low-flying tree that looked curiously Japanese in its distortion. From here they could no longer see the van or Uncle Hu lying in the dust beside it. They could see one gypsy wagon and the silhouette of a horse grazing behind it in the shadows. They could see the fire and Magda's blanket-shrouded body, the woman and the boy. Beyond this circle of light the far-away cliffs were etched sharply against the deep blue night sky. The silence of the plain was almost complete except for the sound of the wind and an occasional muffled shout from the men who searched for Sandor.

"Well," said Mrs. Pollifax dispiritedly.

"Well," said Colin.

Stefan had disappeared. The boy who had been sitting beside Magda at the campfire arose and walked across the open space toward Mrs. Pollifax and Colin. He chose a position a few yards from them and sat down, cross-legged, to watch them now. He watched without expression, his face impassive. Two young men suddenly appeared and began to search Mrs. Pollifax and Colin. Their faces were dark, swarthy and leanly handsome, their hands expertly light. When they came upon Mrs. Pollifax's wad of money and unpinned it they shouted and held it high to show the boy, who laughed delightedly. The two young men added Colin's watch and pen to their treasure and happily walked away.

"A pretty kettle of fish," said Colin savagely.

Mrs. Pollifax said wearily, "I don't know how to make them understand. Surely someone here must have heard English spoken once or twice?"

Colin said doggedly, "They undoubtedly speak Bulgarian—no mean accomplishment since they came from across the border. Of course they speak Romany, and probably some Hungarian as well, and a little Turkish. But even if they understood some English our dear old friend Dr. Belleaux got here first."

"But why would we come here to the gypsies at all with Magda if we'd beaten and drugged her?"

"For the same reason Dr. Belleaux came here: to get from the gypsies what Magda left here with them. In his case before she wakes up and calls him a bloody liar."

"If only she would right now!" said Mrs. Pollifax with feeling. "She'd give one long loud scream at sight of him, and tell these people who he is in their own language, and—but will Dr. Belleaux *allow* her to wake up?"

"No, but he can't very well kill her in plain sight of her friends." He added wryly, "At the moment I'm more worried about us. Nobody here would mind seeing *us* killed, and we haven't one single state secret up our sleeves to prolong our living. He can keep Magda drugged while he goes to work on the gypsies but we're only nuisances. I keep remembering Sebastien. He was going to hitch up his wagon, feed his dancing bear and follow us, remember?"

Mrs. Pollifax said gloomily, "But he didn't expect to find us before dawn, and it can't be midnight yet, can it? And it's more likely he fed his bear and then decided to curl up and sleep for a while. I'd rather put my money on Sandor, who at least—"

She stopped. The gypsies were bringing Sandor back into camp. One

large and muscular gypsy carried him slung across his back like a slab of venison. In a long procession the men crossed their line of vision, passed the campfire and disappeared. "Unconscious," she said despairingly. "Not even capable of explaining in Turkish to the gypsies who we are!"

Colin said soberly, "What do you think Dr. Belleaux has in mind that is, if you can enter that mind of his at all?"

Mrs. Pollifax considered. "I can at least guess. With Magda he has two possibilities: either he will fly her off to Russia with whatever papers he mentioned, or he will kill her and fly off to Russia himself with the mysterious papers. He has that helicopter. I daresay it's provided him by the Russians, and he need only radio ahead and cross the border at some prearranged spot with very little risk of being shot down."

"Either possibility disposes of his pleasant life in Istanbul at least!"

Mrs. Pollifax laughed. "Don't be naïve, my dear Colin. He can easily salvage his pleasant Istanbul life by saying that I murdered Magda."

"And risk a trial?" asked Colin. "Or am I being naïve again?"

"Yes, you are, really," Mrs. Pollifax told him. "Because by that time he will have seen to it that the gypsies kill *me*. Stone me to death, no doubt," she said tartly.

Stefan and Assim reappeared suddenly, carrying a trussed-up but still breathing Sandor. They knotted him to the tree as well it was becoming heavily populated. Stefan said with a grin, "The gypsies hunt well for us, eh? We'll even let them kill you soon."

"Bring that other man here, too," said Dr. Belleaux, strolling in from the shadows. "The tall thin one. What is his name?" he asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"I don't think I'll tell you," she said coldly.

He shrugged. "It scarcely matters in any case." He regarded the tree with interest. "Perhaps this tree is the best solution of all for your demise, certainly less tedious than simulating knife murders for you all by the gypsies. A little kerosene sprinkled at the base of the tree, a match, a flaming tree and there would be no embarrassing traces left at all. The Turkish police," he added, "will be here by dawn. It is so very difficult to puzzle out how to dispose of so many of you."

Mrs. Pollifax said coldly, "You're very disappointing, Dr. Belleaux, you appear to have the mentality of a Neanderthal man except I rather imagine I'm insulting the defenseless Neanderthal. I had expected something a little more imaginative, discriminating and subtle from a man of your obvious taste and background. You must be growing quite desperate."

Dr. Belleaux nodded. "It is a matter to which I must still give careful

attention, Mrs. Pollifax," he admitted. "To me also it feels unpleasantly primitive. I naturally prefer the gypsies to kill you, as I think they will. But you have to be dealt with by dawn, which accelerates the pace. In any case you may rest assured that I will evolve a way of disposing of you all that will suit my own welfare not yours," he added with a charming, if pointed smile. "Ah, you have the fourth one, Stefan—good! He is beginning to stir, and he speaks Turkish, so gag him as well, please. Check all the knots, Assim, and then back to the helicopter."

Mrs. Pollifax said indignantly, "You must realize that Magda will never give you what you want."

Dr. Belleaux smiled. "Of course not, but the gypsies will. They believe what I tell them."

"I find it rather depressing to have been right about that," Mrs. Pollifax said to Colin.

Dr. Belleaux glanced at his watch. "I advise you to say your prayers," he concluded. "I shall be speaking again now by radio to the police in Istanbul, and by dawn the police should be rendezvousing here from all points of Anatolia."

"And you?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"I will be—elsewhere."

The three of them walked off into the darkness and vanished. The boy guarding them also got up suddenly and ran off into the shadows, leaving them alone.

"I'm terribly sorry, Colin," Mrs. Pollifax said with a sigh.

"If you're going to say what I think don't," he told her coldly. "I was never—at any point your responsibility, and you know that. I chose to come along, and I simply won't have you going all bleary and sentimental about me now."

She said gently, "And if I do, dear Colin, precisely what can you do about it?"

He said stiffly, "Well, I shall certainly think the less of you. I've no complaints—it's been a bit of a romp, you know."

She turned her head and looked at him. "I trust that you have the intelligence to realize that you're *not* a coward, and never have been!"

He grinned. "That's rather choice, isn't it? And how else would I have found out?"

The boy was returning. Again he came across the turf but this time he walked up to Mrs. Pollifax and looked into her face searchingly, and then from his pocket he drew out a small knife, leaned over her and cut the ropes at her ankles and wrists.

Colin said in astonishment, "I say am I imagining things, or did he just—"

The boy fiercely shook his head, pressing one finger to his lips. As Mrs. Pollifax stared at him blankly he beckoned her to follow him.

"But the others!" protested Mrs. Pollifax, pointing to Colin and Sandor and Mr. Ramsey.

The boy shook his head. His gestures grew more frantic.

"Go with him for heaven's sake," Colin said in a low voice. "You're not going to look a gift horse in the mouth, are you? If you make a scene he'll tie you up again!"

Torn between loyalty and curiosity Mrs. Pollifax followed him. Once she looked back, and at sight of her friends tied helplessly to the tree she would have gone back to them if the child had not tugged furiously at her baggy pants. What did he want, wondered Mrs. Pollifax and why was he doing this? She limped with him past the horses, around rocks and wagons he was obviously hiding her from the other gypsies, and her curiosity had become almost intolerable when ahead of her she saw a tent pitched between two boulders. It was the only tent that she had seen in the camp. A light inside faintly illuminated its ragged edges and spilled out from its base. The boy pulled aside a curtain and gestured to Mrs. Pollifax to enter.

Mrs. Pollifax walked in. A lantern hung suspended from a tent pole, and seated cross-legged on a pillow beneath it was a square-shouldered gypsy woman. Hair threaded with silver hung to her shoulders, framing a square, high-cheekboned dark face. The eyes in the lantern light smoldered under heavy lids, and now they pierced Mrs. Pollifax like a laser beam.

The boy spoke rapidly to the woman, and she nodded. He beckoned Mrs. Pollifax to sit down in front of the gypsy, and Mrs. Pollifax stiffly lowered herself to the hard earth.

"Give me your hands," the woman said abruptly.

Mrs. Pollifax gasped. "You speak English!"

"Yes. The boy understands some but cannot speak it well."

Mrs. Pollifax's relief was infinite. "Thank heaven!" she cried. "I have tried—"

The woman shook her head. "Just give me your hands, please. Everything you wish to say is written in them, without lies or concealment."

"Without—" Mrs. Pollifax stretched out her hands, suppressing a desire to laugh hysterically. "If you insist," she said. "But there is so little time—"

"The boy tells me he has listened to you speak, and that my people have been lied to." She was gently examining the palms of the hands. "Your wrists are bandaged?"

"Yes. Like Magda's. The man in the white goatee did this."

"Hush." The woman closed her eyes, holding Mrs. Pollifax's hands in silence, as if they spoke a message to her. "You speak truth," she said abruptly, and opened her eyes. To the boy she said. "Bring Goru here at once—quickly! This woman does not lie, she lives under *koosti cherino*, the good stars." As the boy ran out she smiled at Mrs. Pollifax. "You are skeptical, I see."

"You can see this in a hand?"

"But of course—lips may lie but the lines in a hand never do, and I have the gift of *dukkeripen*. You are a widow, are you not? Your hand tells me also that you have begun a second life—a second fate line has begun to parallel the first one."

"All widows begin second lives," pointed out Mrs. Pollifax gently.

The woman smiled into her eyes. "With so many marks of preservation on that second line, showing escape from dangers? And a cross on the mount of Saturn, foretelling the possibility of violent death at some future date?" She allowed Mrs. Pollifax to withdraw her hand. "But I am clairvoyant as well," she went on. "When I hold a hand I get pictures, as well as vibrations of good or evil. I feel that you have come to this country only days ago—by plane, I believe—and I get a very strong picture of you tied to a chair—this is very recent, is it not?—in a room where there is straw in one corner, and a door that has been bricked-over."

"How very astonishing!" said Mrs. Pollifax.

The woman's smile deepened. "You see the waste of words, then. But here is Goru."

Goru was enormous—it was he who had carried Sandor back to camp slung over his shoulder—and he was made even larger by the bulky sheepskin jacket he wore. As the woman talked to him he looked at Mrs. Pollifax with growing surprise, and then with humor. He made a magnificent shrug, snapped his fingers and grinned. With a bow to Mrs. Pollifax he hurried out.

The woman nodded. "We shall have some sport with that *gorgio*," she said in contempt. "The man descended on us like a bird in his machine, and spoke knowingly and urgently about Magda. He knew everything! How is that?"

"He drugged her earlier tonight, with the kind of drug that produces confession," explained Mrs. Pollifax. "You will help us now?"

The woman's lip curled. "Wars. Assassinations. Drugs that make even a Magda speak " She shook her head. "I do not understand this civilization of yours. Do not look so anxious for your friends, my dear trust Goru. You came to this country to help Magda?"

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "But I can tell you nothing that Dr. Belleaux has not already said—except," she added with dignity, "that Magda was

not drugged when she spoke to me of going to Yozgat to find the Inglescus."

The woman smiled. "I am Anyeta Inglescu."

"Are you?" Mrs. Pollifax was pleased, and put out her hand. "I'm Emily Pollifax."

"The name of Inglescu was not mentioned by the man with the goatee," the gypsy added. "But I do not understand why he goes to such trouble to speak lies, to try and fool us."

Mrs. Pollifax said bluntly, "He wants the document Magda escaped with."

"Document?" said the woman curiously.

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "Whatever it is that Magda brought with her out of Bulgaria and entrusted to you." She gestured helplessly. "Microfilm. Microdots. Code. She has told me nothing except that she preferred risking death to abandoning it."

Anyeta Inglescu laughed. "I see." Lifting her voice she called out, and the boy who had brought Mrs. Pollifax to the tent came inside. "Come here," she told him gently, and taking his hand said to Mrs. Pollifax, "This is what Magda brought out of Bulgaria and left with us."

"I beg your pardon?" said Mrs. Pollifax blankly.

"You did not know that Magda has a grandchild? This is Dmitri Gurdjieff. She smuggled him out of Bulgaria, and entrusted him to us when she went to Istanbul to get help."

"Grandchild?" faltered Mrs. Pollifax. "Dmitri?" She stared incredulously at the boy and then she began to smile and the smile spread through her like warm wine until it merged in a laugh of purest delight. She understood perfectly: she was a grandmother herself. But what exquisite irony for Dr. Belleaux, she thought, that the treasure Magda had smuggled out from the iron curtain was her grandson! "But this is marvelous!" she cried. Gesturing toward the darkness beyond the tent she explained, "Out there secret agents are fighting, bribing, even killing in their greed to learn what Magda brought out with her and it's a small boy! Nine or ten?" she asked.

"Actually he is eleven," Anyeta said.

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "I have three grandchildren myself, and you?"

Anyeta laughed. "A dozen at least." They both regarded the boy tenderly, and he smiled at them. "His father is a high Communist official, very busy, scarcely known to the boy, and now he has remarried. Perhaps you did not know that Magda had a daughter born of her first marriage. The daughter died last year. Magda could not leave without the child."

The boy suddenly spoke. "Is not all so."

"What is not all so?" asked the gypsy.

"There is more." He had grown quite pale. Reaching inside his ragged shirt he said, "Is time maybe to speak, Anyeta. There is more."

He pulled out a blue stone tied to a coarse string around his neck. "This."

Anyeta smiled and shook her head. "That is your Evil Eye, Dmitri. It's only part of your disguise. Turkish children wear them to ward off evil."

The boy stubbornly shook his head. "It's more, Anyeta. Grandma gave it me in Sofia."

Anyeta's eyes narrowed. "In *Sofia*?" she said in a surprised voice.

"Da. Is hollow inside—for secrets."

Anyeta drew in her breath sharply. "Allah protect us!" she said in amazement. "I see, I begin to understand . . . but what can it be?"

Mrs. Pollifax smiled. "Her social security, I think," she said, and the last piece of the puzzle fell into place.

CHAPTER 16

SUDDENLY GORU WAS BACK IN THE TENT, SPEAKING RAPIDLY TO Anyeta in an excited breathless voice. Anyeta's eyes narrowed, she nodded and turned to Mrs. Pollifax. "The man with the goatee has finished his work with the radio in the plane and is starting back to the camp. Goru asks you to return quickly to your friends and be tied up again."

In spite of Mrs. Pollifax's horror of being tied again she responded to the firmness and the urgency in the woman's voice. At the door of the tent she turned; Anyeta Inglescu had not stirred from her position. "You're not coming?" she asked.

The gypsy woman smiled. "I cannot walk," she said with a shrug of regret. "I have not walked in fifteen years."

"I'm sorry," said Mrs. Pollifax, surprised.

Goru had vanished; the boy Dmitri tugged at her arm nervously, and he guided her through the rocks back to the tree.

"What the devil!" cried Colin, seeing her. "Didn't you make a dash for it? Mrs. Pollifax, why the hell didn't you try to escape?"

She shook her head. "It's all right, Colin — really."

"All right? He's tying you up again!"

"Yes, I know." She turned and said carefully. "Listen but don't say anything, Colin, there isn't time. This boy understands English."

"*He* does?"

"Ssh," said Mrs. Pollifax as Dr. Belleaux came striding back.

He went first to the campfire and looked down at Magda, then he leaned over, felt her pulse, nodded and straightened. Seeing the gypsies emerge silently from their wagons he gestured them closer and began speaking to them. Eloquently he spread his arms, smiled, frowned, pointed to Magda, then to Mrs. Pollifax and Colin, his voice becoming increasingly edged with contempt and indignation. It was surprising,

thought Mrs. Pollifax, how much could be communicated without a single word being understood.

"Born orator," growled Colin. "Real Hyde Park material."

"Can you catch any of it at all?"

"Just the word kill, which occurs with monotonous frequency," said Colin dryly.

Beckoning his audience closer Dr. Belleaux drew them away from the campfire toward the small group at the tree. Within minutes Mrs. Pollifax was surrounded closely and in danger of developing claustrophobia. At this point Dr. Belleaux suddenly drew out a knife; he seemed to be challenging one of the gypsies to use it, and to Mrs. Pollifax's surprise Goru stepped forward and grasped the knife, the gypsies cheering with approval at his move.

Goru ran his fingers over the knife's edge and tested it lovingly. The expression on his face made Mrs. Pollifax shiver. She looked up into the stolid faces of the gypsies and then at the triumphant smile on Dr. Belleaux's lips and she experienced the first chill of doubt. She realized that she had allowed herself to be tied up again, and that she was helpless. She remembered the money taken from her by the gypsy youths . . . it was so very *much* money. Now that Magda had been returned to the gypsies of what value really was she, or Colin, or his uncle or Sandor, compared to the wealth they had brought into the camp? It was wealth that would have to be given back if the gypsies chose to save them. She had trusted Anyeta but the woman was an invalid—had she really any influence? What if Goru chose to disbelieve or to ignore her? For the first time she realized that her being persuaded back to the tree could be a cunning trick, and she a fool to have trusted the persuaders.

Goru suddenly laughed and called out to one of his companions, who brought him a small jug. "*Icki,*" Goru said to Dr. Belleaux, and held out the jug to him. Dr. Belleaux sighed with exasperation as he accepted it. Another gypsy handed jugs to Stefan and to Assim, and at once jugs blossomed everywhere among the gypsies. Apparently a toast had been proposed by Goru a toast to their murders, wondered Mrs. Pollifax?

"I don't like this," Colin said in a low voice.

Obviously Dr. Belleaux did not like it, either. Impatiently he lifted the jug to his lips, drained it, threw the empty vessel to the ground and spoke sharply to Goru. Goru, sipping his drink like a connoisseur, smiled back at him and smacked his lips appreciatively.

Angrily Dr. Belleaux seized the knife from Goru's hand. "*Budala,*" he snarled and turned to Mrs. Pollifax. "Enough delay!" he said, and looking down at her in a cold fury, he lifted the knife for its thrust into her heart.

Behind him no one stirred. The gypsies watched with a passive, detached interest, and Mrs. Pollifax realized they were not going to stop her murder. Dr. Belleaux's livid face came close and she gasped, bracing herself against his blow, and then she gasped again as he continued a headlong descent and pitched into her lap, the knife still in his hand, his body limp. He twitched once, and then was still.

"They will sleep for eight hours, they are not dead," Anyeta was explaining to Colin and Mrs. Pollifax. "We would be fools to kill a *gorgio*, the police are our enemies everywhere, like fleas forever on our backs."

An unbelievable amount of activity was taking place in the gypsy camp; Anyeta had been carried from her tent to a wagon where she sat on a cushion giving orders in a low husky voice. Her tent had been struck and packed away, and the two campfires extinguished and raked. Horses were being harnessed to the wagons, and the three casualties of the night — Magda, Sandor and Ramsey — had already been stowed carefully away in one of the wagons, wrapped in blankets and still unconscious.

"We have our own drugs, but kinder than theirs because they are herbs as old as time," she explained with a flash of a smile. "The three men will sleep dreamlessly for eight hours, and wake up refreshed. By then we must be far away."

"But where did your men carry them?" asked Colin.

"To the plane, where they have been strapped into the seats. They will make a peaceful picture when they are found. Now it is time to ask you an important question: You have found us, and you have found Magda's grandson, and soon she will open her eyes to see him, too. What do you plan to do with her?"

Mrs. Pollifax explained their hopes that Magda might be alert enough to be placed on the Friday plane at Kayseri.

"She has passport?"

"She has passport, ticket, money and clothes."

Anyeta smiled broadly. "Not money." She shook her head. "Yule!"

The youth who had robbed Mrs. Pollifax ran over, and Anyeta held out her palm. The young man grinned handsomely, brought the wad of bills from his pocket and bowed as he placed them in Anyeta's hand.

"He is very skillful, we are proud of him," Anyeta told Mrs. Pollifax. "But of course we do not steal from friends. Count it." She affectionately boxed his ears and he ran off to help with the loading. "So. You wish to take Magda to Kayseri. That is good — we head in that direction. What is more difficult is a place to hide for a day or two. You say Friday?"

"Yes. It must be Thursday by now. The plane leaves Friday morning

at eight. The next plane is Monday, but who knows what could have happened by then?"

Anyeta nodded. "No hiding place is safe for that long! A place for us all to wait safely, then, during the daylight hours today. Yes I know of one, but far we must go straight as the eagle flies toward the rock country near Ürgüp. From there it will take only hours to walk or ride to Kayseri, and it will be dark again when the time comes to get her to the airport." She nodded. "Very good."

A long shrill whistle broke the silence. "We are ready to go," Anyeta said. "We go cross-country, avoiding all roads."

Mrs. Pollifax took leave of her and hurried to the wagon in which her friends lay. Colin climbed into the van he was to drive it a few miles from the scene and leave it hidden, to be found later. The wagons formed a line. From the lead wagon in which Anyeta and Goru rode there came a shout, and six wagons began to move into the night with only the stars to guide them south.

There was no tarpaulin over the wagon in which Mrs. Pollifax rode, and she could feel the softness of the cool night air on her cheeks. The wagon creaked and groaned over the untilled, rocky ground but the movement and the creaks were not unpleasant, and as her eyes adapted to the darkness Mrs. Pollifax could decipher rocks and boulders to left and right, and at last the silhouettes of her companions. Magda was beginning to stir at last, to fling out a hand and murmur occasional unintelligible words. The silhouette of dark curly hair beside her was Dmitri—her grandson, Mrs. Pollifax repeated to herself, still touched and amazed by the discovery. Colin drove the van that whined in low gear behind them while his uncle snored peacefully on the floor of the wagon, sharing a blanket with Sandor, who had also slipped into the exhausted sleep that still eluded Mrs. Pollifax.

Magda called out sharply, and Mrs. Pollifax crawled over Sandor and Ramsey to look at her. Dmitri was leaning over speaking to her, and Magda said, "It's you? It's really you, Dmitri?" in a wondering and astonished voice.

"Good morning," said Mrs. Pollifax. "I believe it's morning!"

Magda began to laugh. "And you too? No no, it is too much," she gasped, and reached for Mrs. Pollifax's hand. "Again you have rescued me. And found Dmitri!"

"It's been a long night," admitted Mrs. Pollifax, "but I had a great deal of help: Colin and Sandor, Colin's uncle, a girl named Sabahat and your gypsies."

Magda's laughter abruptly turned into tears, and then into exhausted, wrenching sobs.

"It's all right, Dmitri, let her cry," Mrs. Pollifax told the boy, patting his shoulder. "She'll feel better for it, she's been through so much."

Gradually Magda's tears subsided and she slept. She would need that sleep if she was to gain enough strength to board a plane within twenty-four hours — and that, thought Mrs. Pollifax as she crawled back to her corner of the wagon, was the one thing that mattered now. The seriousness of her own plight had dimmed once she had met Dmitri — and then the boy had pulled the Evil Eye from under his ragged shirt to show her, and Mrs. Pollifax had understood that she was of no importance at all to Dr. Belleaux, nor was Magda or her grandson. From the beginning he had been set upon recovering something more. What had Carstairs said? "The mystery is why Ferenci-Sabo's abductors didn't silence her on the spot by killing her — they certainly had no difficulties in gaining access to the consulate, damn it. Obviously Ferenci-Sabo still has more value to them alive."

But not because of Dmitri, Mrs. Pollifax realized. The kidnapped son of a high Bulgarian official would never bring about such a merciless pursuit. At most it would beget inquiries and protests at a government level, but not murder after murder, and certainly not the possible loss of Dr. Belleaux as a highly placed counteragent in Istanbul. Since Magda had not been killed following her abduction it was obvious that the knowledge Magda carried in her head was of less concern to the Communists than what she had carried out with her that was concrete, graspable, returnable and of an almost hysterical significance to them. Only after this had been recovered would Magda be silenced.

"A great deal changed with the invasion of Czechoslovakia," mused Mrs. Pollifax. "Perhaps even Russia's leadership changed, but certainly to the western world she turned suddenly irrational, paranoiac, unpredictable. As to what might be sealed inside that innocent-looking blue stone I can only guess, of course. What might it be to prove so threatening to the Communists? Transcripts of a terribly secret conversation? a photostatic copy of the minutes of a Politburo meeting? It would have to be an important clue as to what happened that August, and what can be expected in the future, and this would matter a great deal to NATO, to Yugoslavia and Rumania, to future nuclear pacts, to the balance of power."

Magda and her blue stone had to be gotten out of Turkey.

Not even Dmitri could be involved in the departure now. Perhaps Colin could look after the child until he had acquired the necessary papers to travel. She had no illusions as to what lay in store for herself, and jail would be no place for the boy.

The caravan halted, and Goru went to the rear of the line and spoke to Colin; the van was directed off the road, and several minutes later Colin jumped into the wagon beside Mrs. Pollifax carrying the van's battery in his arms. "Good lord what terrain!" he gasped. "Thought I'd have to abandon her long before this! No wonder roads are called the lifelines of civilization."

"Where did you leave the van?" asked Mrs. Pollifax curiously.

"There's a deserted village in there—Anatolia is pockmarked with them. A well runs dry, the people just move on and start a new village. I rammed the truck into one of the buildings that still has a roof." He glanced up at the sky. "It's just past three now, you know, it'll be dawn in an hour or so, and there's that damn helicopter to worry about as soon as it's light."

"Yes, the helicopter," sighed Mrs. Pollifax.

They dozed uncomfortably for another hour. Just as the country around them was growing visible in the cold first-light they crossed a main road, the first Mrs. Pollifax had seen since they left Yozgat. They crossed it wagon by wagon, with Goru waving each one on or back. Then they resumed their interminable procession southward. It must have been the Kayseri-Kirsehir road, Colin said drowsily, but Mrs. Pollifax only half-heard him.

When she opened her eyes again Magda was awake, propped up against the side of the wagon with one hand resting on Dmitri, who had fallen asleep with his head in her lap. The sun was rising with an explosion of colors that swept the sky like a wash of watercolor. Mrs. Pollifax looked at Magda and saw that her eyes were fastened almost hypnotically on Colin's sleeping uncle. Seeing Mrs. Pollifax sit up Magda lifted her free hand and waved at her, but it was with a puzzled frown that she said, "This man here—I do not understand where he came from."

"He just arrived," said Mrs. Pollifax with humor.

"He so much resembles someone I once knew."

"He does?"

Magda nodded. "Someone I've not seen in—oh, twenty-five years at least. Many times I've wondered what happened to that man—one does, you know," she said with a faint smile. "Yet I believed I'd forgotten him until I saw this man. That same beak of a nose—"

Mrs. Pollifax looked at Uncle Hu buried in his blanket and said with a twinkle, "His nose is all one *can* see of him. Who is the man he reminds you of—a good sort, I hope?"

Magda nodded. "I have loved only two men in my life. There was my first husband Philippe—they called him the rich French playboy but it was the big performance with him because he too was an agent." She

looked across the tangle of sleeping bodies at Mrs. Pollifax. "You understand he worked for his government the French—in Intelligence. We had one year together before he was murdered."

"By whom?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"They were called Reds then," said Magda. "Only they did not just murder him, they arranged it to appear I had done their work. He was shot with my small pistol, still with my fingerprints on it, and there had been arranged false evidence of a lover." She shrugged. "It was blackmail. I would have preferred to kill myself but I was expecting a child, which revived my interest in living. And they did not know I already worked for my husband's people. I took my problem to French Intelligence."

"So that's when you became a double agent."

"Yes." Magda was silent, and then, "At least until World War Two when I work also with America and England." Her lips curved ruefully. "One does not expect to love a second time. I did not believe I had the heart left."

"But you did!" suggested Mrs. Pollifax with interest.

Magda sighed. "One cannot control such matters, eh? It was only an encounter, a passing thing, it was all it could mean with me because by then I was vulnerable, my daughter a hostage growing up in Russia." She frowned. "I have learned that one's life assumes a pattern call it karma if you will. At every turning point in my life I am always thrust back into this work, as if a firm hand insists upon it. It has not been my karma to be either wife or mother for long."

Mrs. Pollifax said, "Perhaps it is now. As I understand karma and the subject has interested me lately a person can eventually work through to another level, isn't this true? There are karmic debts to be paid, but if one manages them well, and cheerfully, there comes a time when one moves on to a new level, a new beginning, a different karma."

"You speak as if you feel this," said Magda curiously.

Mrs. Pollifax laughed. "I can only tell you that suddenly—after quiet years of marriage and family life, and at my age, too! I have entered a very dangerous profession. It's preposterous, as if the page of a book had been abruptly turned over by the wind. Mistake? Coincidence? Accident? There feels more to it than that. Perhaps I enter your kind of life just as you leave it for something else now."

"I could hope this for me," said Magda soberly.

"Do keep hoping," said Mrs. Pollifax, her gaze falling on Hu Ramsey with humor and a touch of mischief. She thought that just when life appeared to have no discernible pattern there could arrive a coincidence so startling that one could envision Forces tugging, arranging, balanc-

ing, contriving and contracting all the arrivals and departures of life. Magda and Colin's uncle had met once, years ago: now they met again through the most absurd of coincidences in the center of Turkish Anatolia. Mrs. Pollifax chuckled; it was so statistically impossible that she thought it had to be an act of cosmic humor, even of cosmic playfulness.

It was growing dangerously light when a shout came from a wagon up ahead. Goru stood up and waved, pointed, and Mrs. Pollifax understood that they were reaching their destination. She looked again at the high cliff that she had been examining from a distance for some time; now it rose sharply above them on their right, appearing to almost touch the sky. Here and there holes had been punched through the cliff by a giant hand, like a great wall with windows in it. Mrs. Pollifax sat up, alert and interested.

In the rubble that spilled down from the cliff like lava she could make out the shapes of crumbling houses; the hill running up to the cliff was honeycombed with caves, holes and the ruins of abandoned buildings. The wagons ahead had already begun to turn and head up the hill through the debris in a circling, ascending line. "What a wonderful hiding place!" said Mrs. Pollifax. "Unless " She paused doubtfully. "Unless it's so good that it becomes the first place Dr. Belleaux looks for us."

Colin shook his head. "Not the first. I've driven through this part of the country with Uncle Hu, and it's even more dramatic further along. The rocks fairly jump out of the earth like weird stalactites. At Göreme they're called fairy tale chimneys—the early Christians hid in those rock chimneys centuries ago, hollowing them out inside and carving air holes and windows. They left behind fantastic Byzantine frescoes on their interior walls. The whole valley is full of surprises."

"Really? I wish I'd pinned the guidebook to my trousers."

"You ran out of pins," Colin reminded her.

The first wagon had reached the summit, and Goru had climbed out, looking small and doll-like against the great height of the wall behind him, and separated from the rest of them by the mountain of rubble. Their own wagon was lurching and slipping now as it followed the narrow rock-strewn path upward toward the top. Mrs. Pollifax clung to the sides of the wagon and prayed. Each time she looked ahead, a wagon in the line ahead had disappeared and she could only hope that it had safely reached Goru and been directed out of sight, and had not instead plunged into a hole or rolled back down the hill. They climbed higher and higher until Goru came into sight, suddenly his own size again. They had reached the top of the rubble, with the cliff above them.

By a curious freak of nature there was no rubble close to the cliff

wall, and a kind of primitive, washed-out road curved up and down behind the houses that had once been built into the hill and inhabited. But as the wall had eroded over the decades perhaps even centuries the rocks and silt it sent down had fallen upon the houses, missing the small avenue directly under the wall, but leaving holes in the roofs that it did not completely demolish, and piling debris around the sinking homes. Along this primitive avenue the wagons had stopped, each in front of a ruin that still boasted a roof or half-roof while the men dug out rocks to allow their wagons inside. One by one Mrs. Pollifax saw the wagons backed out of view.

Their driver was Yule, who leaped down and began shouldering aside rocks—they were now the only wagon exposed. Colin jumped down to help, and behind her Mrs. Pollifax heard a startled voice say, "Wotthehell!"

"Sandor," she murmured, smiling, and turned.

Sandor was sitting erect rubbing his head but his eyes were on Magda and Ramsey. Mrs. Pollifax saw that these two were both awake and staring at each other with interest and astonishment; she had the impression that they must have been mutely observing one another for some time.

Colin's uncle said abruptly, "You're thinner. You never did care sufficiently about meals no schedule at all. If you'd married me I should have insisted upon your eating. Why didn't you?"

"Why didn't I which—marry you, or eat?"

"You should have done both, you know. I've felt damnably juvenile not marrying all these years, but there's simply been no one to equal you. Why didn't you marry me?"

"I had a daughter in Russia."

"You could have told me, couldn't you?"

"Never," she said fondly. "You know you would have charged the Kremlin, Hugh, demanding she be brought to England—you would have gotten your head chopped off."

"It's France that has the guillotine, in Moscow I think it would be a firing squad," he reminded her.

Sandor was grinning broadly. He climbed past them to Mrs. Pollifax. "She knows him too!" he said.

At that moment someone shouted, and Goru came running toward them looking visibly alarmed. Ramsey spoke to him in Turkish and looked appalled. "It's the plane!" he shouted. "Get the wagon hidden! There's a plane on the horizon heading this way!"

CHAPTER 17

TWO MEN APPEARED FROM NOWHERE AND TOOK AWAY THE HORSE. Five more men raced from a hole in the rocks and actually lifted the wagon over a wall of tumbling stone and into the cellar of a house. The wagon sustained only one casualty—a wheel fell off—but the miracle was that it had not happened sooner.

Their hiding place was not unpleasant. The brilliant morning sun fell through the half-ruined floor in lattice-work squares and stripes. There were stone walls on three sides of them, and half a roof over their heads but the front of the house had long since vanished, and from the shadows Mrs. Pollifax had a breathtaking panoramic view across the valley. It was like hiding under a porch that had been swept to the top of a mountain.

From here Mrs. Pollifax could see the helicopter move slowly across the valley in the tilting, gliding, oddly tipsy fashion that to Mrs. Pollifax confounded all laws of air flight. It drew nearer, disappeared behind the cliff and then suddenly roared down over their heads. For a full moment it hung suspended over them, a giant eye searching for one tell-tale slip, one unexplained shadow, one sign of careless movement. It was frightening. When it lifted and began to beat its way slowly down to the other end of the cliff Mrs. Pollifax realized that she had been holding her breath. She expelled it slowly, realizing that this could happen again and again during the day. It was not a happy thought.

Magda said suddenly, angrily, "I cannot take a plane tomorrow morning and leave Dmitri to this. Never."

Mrs. Pollifax turned and looked into her face. The helicopter had affected her in the same way, delivering them all into a nightmare inhabited by birds of prey that swept down from the sky to look for them. "Yes, it's time to make plans," she said firmly. "Let's go and find Anyeta. The plane is gone?"

Colin nodded. "It disappeared southward."
"Good. We'll talk."

They formed a circle inside the cave in which Anyeta had taken refuge. "We move at dark," Anyeta said. "Goru says that will be about nine-thirty tonight. It will be necessary to move slowly in order to be careful, and because the way is not familiar. Goru does not know where the aerodrome is at Kayseri."

"I do," said Hu Ramsey. "Fortunately it's to the west of the town on this side of it—so that there's no need to go through Kayseri. Look here, if I went back and got the van —"

"I used up nearly all of the spare gas last night," said Colin. "I'd calculate about ten more miles of gas are left in the tank. Twelve at most."

"Damn," said Uncle Hu mildly. "Colin, you know how far away the van is. Where would the nearest petrol station be?"

"Nearest to the van, you mean? Kirsehir definitely. But if you're thinking of retrieving it to get Magda to the aerodrome then you've got to remember that the search for the van may not have been called off yet. The license may still be on their lists. Someone's bound to stop you again, as they did at Yozgat, and that's perfectly all right if you're alone but if you ever had Magda and Mrs. Pollifax with you—" Colin shook his head. "Kaput. Finis!"

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "He's quite right. I think Magda *must* get to the aerodrome by wagon, the van's too conspicuous."

Magda looked pensive. "I've no reservation for the eight o'clock flight, or even for the London flight. What if there is no room for me?"

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "We must organize this very very carefully. Like generals plotting a battle."

"Gung ho and all that," suggested Colin, grinning.

"Exactly. Goru, you say you don't know where the aerodrome is. I think someone must go and find it—now, while it's daylight."

Anyeta translated this to Goru, who replied. "He will go himself," she said. "Alone. He will take a horse and find the best route for the wagons, also."

"There's another possibility," went on Mrs. Pollifax. "Magda wants to know that Dmitri will not become involved in this. She also needs a reservation for the flight—it would certainly be reassuring to have one for Alice Dexter White clear through to London and Mr. Ramsey has his van to retrieve, which has in it roughly enough gas to get to Kirsehir." She lifted her gaze. "Mr. Ramsey, if you could take Dmitri with you and reach that van sometime today, then you could drive it to Kirsehir for gas, and telephone the airport in Kayseri for Magda's flight reserva-

tions. You could also provide a -well, a diversion. Kirsehir looks quite removed from Kayseri on this map. If the police should stop the van you'd have with you only a small boy picked up on the road. You've already been checked out at Yozgat—it's possible you wouldn't be taken to jail again. You could then drive on to Ankara."

Ramsey shot her a quick glance. "Quite right, of course." He looked distinctly unhappy but it was to his credit, thought Mrs. Pollifax, that he did not protest leaving Magda. He was a man who could accept necessity.

"You would do that?" Magda said hopefully. "Hugh, I cannot tell you how grateful I would be."

"Of course I can do it," he said crisply. "Dmitri, you'll try me out next as a companion?"

"Must?" he said in a dispirited voice to Magda.

She spoke to him gently in Russian and he listened gravely, then with growing brightness. "Da," he told Ramsey, nodding. "I go. I am how you say—gung ho?"

"Good boy," Ramsey said, ruffling his hair.

"You will need a horse and a guide," Anyeta told him. "Yule will go—he knows where the van is hidden, and he can bring the horse back before night. Anything else?"

They all leaned over the map to pinpoint their present location, the best route to Kirsehir for Ramsey, and the precise area of the Kayseri aerodrome. "Don't head south," Uncle Hu warned Goru. "The police have a station here"—he pointed "at Inescu. As you can see, that's a little too near for comfort."

Goru nodded and stood up. *"Allaha ismarladik,"* he said.

"Gule, gule," said Uncle Hu, shaking his hand.

Mrs. Pollifax was busy thinking. "Magda will need sleep and food today," she told Anyeta. "Near the end of the day I'll fit her into my American clothes, which she can wear under her Turkish ones." Was there anything else, she wondered, mentally ticking off the plans. Magda would still be very weak. If they could reach the airport while it was still dark a wagon could deposit Magda very near to the air terminal without such unconventional arrival being noticed; she could peel off her Turkish clothes, leave them behind in the wagon and walk into the terminal as Alice Dexter White, American tourist. If her reservation had already been made by telephone then she need only pay for it automatically Mrs. Pollifax felt for the wad of money pinned to her baggy pants and nodded and then walk through Customs to the lounge.

"A suitcase," said Mrs. Pollifax. "She ought to have a suitcase like everyone else."

"Good thinking," said Colin, "but we've only that horrible cardboard thing Madrali fetched us. An American tourist carrying *that would* be frighteningly conspicuous."

Uncle Hu said, "Wait a minute, I can contribute one from the van Yule can bring it back with him tonight. It's old and battered, I've kept film in it for years but it's definitely Bond Street and very British."

"Then that's it, isn't it?" announced Colin.

Anyeta produced a pair of crutches and joined them as they walked outside to see the horses saddled. Goru was just leaving, and she called out to him; he nodded and waved. "I told him to make his way to the end of the cliff, following the shade, so that if the plane should come back and see him there would be no sign of where he came from. You must do the same, Mr. Ramsey."

He nodded absently and turned to Magda. "You will be careful," he said flatly.

"I will be careful."

"It's not easy to leave you when I've just found you. You'll wait for me and Dmitri in Scotland?"

She nodded.

He leaned over and held her for a moment silently, and then he turned to Dmitri, smiled and said, "Well, Dmitri? We begin a long journey, you and I."

For a moment Dmitri and Magda clung to each other, and then he carefully removed the Evil Eye from around his neck and passed it over his grandmother's head. "Now is yours to guard," he said.

One of the men stationed above them on the cliffside shouted words down to Anyeta. "He says there is no sign of the plane, it is time you go quickly."

Lifting Dmitri to the saddle of his horse Ramsey said firmly, "We mustn't keep Yule waiting. Off we go, Dmitri. Gung ho, what?"

When they had disappeared along the cliff Mrs. Pollifax and Colin lingered outside to look out over the bright, sunlit, dusty valley. "Tomorrow at this time," began Mrs. Pollifax, seating herself on a crumbling wall.

"Yes?" said Colin, joining her.

She shook her head. "It's what makes sleep so impossible — the waiting," Mrs. Pollifax explained. "The not-knowing." She stared across the valley, her eyes narrowed against the brilliance of sun on whitened rock. "I love this part of the country," she said suddenly. "I've never seen anything quite like it. I had thought Turkey so dark —"

"Its history is dark."

"But look at it — everything sun-baked, the color of cream and old lace and ripe wheat and bleached rock and yellow grass, and then this brilliant blue sky and every now and then clumps of green the color of jade. I do wish I were an artist. What on earth are you scribbling?"

Colin grinned. "I intend to spend this endless day of ours shooting film, and I'm jotting down your adjectives. Uncle Hu could use them. He does his own narrations, you know."

"Would I get residuals?" asked Mrs. Pollifax with interest.

"Would you insist on it?"

"No."

"Good," said Colin briskly, "because I'm sure Uncle Hu doesn't even know what the word means, and the most you could expect would be a thank-you note."

He added firmly, with a confidence she'd not heard before, "I've decided there's something I can do to pay Uncle Hu back for his kindnesses, and that's to film the gypsies. You may not realize it, but in all his years in this country he's never been able to catch more than a passing shot of them from his car." He added dryly, "You can perhaps understand the difficulties in approaching them now. It's bothered him excessively. Now at last he has the opportunity to spend a day with them, film them, make friends with them, and damned if he's not off on an errand of mercy. The chance of a lifetime and he's missing it! I'm going to ask Anyeta if I can poke around filming her gypsies today."

"I'll come with you," said Mrs. Pollifax.

The hours of the day were long but not unpleasant. In midmorning they ate warmed-over *domatesli pilaf* heated by Anyeta on a small, almost smokeless charcoal brazier. The horses were fed. Sandor took over the mending of the damaged wagon wheel and Colin roamed ubiquitously over the cliff with his camera, popping in and out of caves and cellars, following Magda and Mrs. Pollifax to the well when they drew water for Anyeta, filming the gypsy children at their play and the women at work.

The helicopter did not return but twice a small plane flew over, sending everyone into hiding until it was gone. "Police, I think," said Colin, squinting up at it through holes in the roof, and Anyeta sent out orders to double the lookouts posted on the cliff.

"She is a queen, you know — literally," Magda said during a moment when Anyeta ventured out on crutches to oversee the wagon's mending. "It is she who holds all the people together. Not only these, but many more."

"Queen of gypsies!" mused Mrs. Pollifax. "And now I have met one personally . . . She comes from Bulgaria?"

"Oh no," Magda said firmly. "No, I am not the only person she smuggled out. The gypsies in Bulgaria—it is a country very close to Russia ideologically—are being absorbed into Bulgarian life. They allow no nonsense, the Bulgars, and the gypsy children are made to go to school, to conform, to put aside their heritage and become good workers in the Bulgarian Communist life. It troubles the older ones. No, Anyeta and Goru also smuggled out illegally some of the Rom who wished to leave. Not many but a few."

"Not all of the eastern European countries are so rigid then?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"Oh no! Anyeta's roots are in Rumania, and from Rumania the gypsies wander freely into Yugoslavia over the mountains, and from there into Italy or western Germany."

"How did she lose the use of her legs—polio?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

Magda laughed. "That is something not even I can discover! But it is said by the Rom that her gift for clairvoyance tripled when she lost the power to walk—as if all her strength went to this gift for the psychic." She shook her head admiringly. "She is an astonishing woman. When I first met her—"

"Where?" asked Mrs. Pollifax eagerly.

"It was in Budapest many years ago, in a cafe, and she was wearing pearls and diamonds. I was stunned to learn she was an Inglescu." Magda looked at Mrs. Pollifax and nodded. "Is this not amazing? Can you see her in diamonds? It is the wonder of life, such things. Perhaps you have heard of ____?" She mentioned the name of a European concert violinist.

"Indeed I have," said Mrs. Pollifax. "I heard him play years ago in Carnegie Hall on one of his few American tours."

Magda nodded. "He was half-gypsy, you know. That was Anyeta's husband. But she is *all* gypsy, and grew sick from the *gorgio*'s life. I hear that she became very thin, very pale, very sad, and nearly died. She had to come back to her people."

"To this," said Mrs. Pollifax reflectively, looking out at the sun and the white rocks. "I can only barely understand. Two days ago I wouldn't have understood at all."

Magda said softly, "The gypsies have a song—the words go like this:

> Worldly goods that possess,
> Own and destroy you.
> Love must be like the blowing wind.
> Capture the wind between walls
> and it becomes stale.

Open tents.
Open hearts.
Let the wind blow . . ."

They were silent and then Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "Yes," she said quietly.

Magda slept, and seeing Anyeta watch her Mrs. Pollifax said curiously, "Does your gift for clairvoyance tell you anything?"

Anyeta was silent and then she said reluctantly, "I get no picture of Madga on a plane. Something is in the way, something intrudes. I am uneasy . . ."

Night came swiftly, like a blanket tossed over the plateau abruptly snuffing out the twilight. Yule had returned leading the spare horse. Yes, the Englishman and Dmitri had reached the van in midafternoon and he had watched while the battery was put in and he had seen the van leave. Its dust had been visible for some miles, and he was sure the two had reached the Kırsehir road successfully. Goru did not get back until dark; he had seen many police patroling the roads but he had avoided them and discovered the aerodrome. He had also found a valley through the mountains that would take them through the rock country without crossing any major roads. He looked exhausted, and Mrs. Pollifax guessed that he had combed the whole valley for the best route. He would have made a wonderful general, she thought, glad that he was on their side, but of course he was already Anyeta's guerrilla chieftain as he moved the gypsies over borders and through hostile countries. She watched him touch Magda on the shoulder and smile at her, and she realized the many years these people had known Magda, building a relationship that was tolerant and free and fiercely loyal.

Under her Turkish baggy pants Magda wore Mrs. Pollifax's knit suit and blouse. Now Mrs. Pollifax gave her passport and money. "In case we are separated," she said, trying not to remember Anyeta's uneasiness.

They moved out a little after ten o'clock. There had been some discussion of three wagons heading south to divert attention, but this had been quickly vetoed. Anyeta said flatly, "We Zingari stick together. We live, breathe, eat, die together. We also fight together." Mrs. Pollifax was inclined to be grateful for this. It was true that six wagons made more noise, were less mobile and more conspicuous but she too felt more secure with a full complement of gypsies around her. They were a formidable group to defy, as she knew personally from the previous evening.

They bypassed the town of Ürgüp and moved across the valley into

the shadows of *Topuz Dagi* that unyieldingly guarded the eastern perimeter, its peak remote and sharp against the stars. The sky was brighter tonight. "There'll be a moon later," Colin said. "It must already be rising behind that mountain range."

"How far is it to Kayseri in miles?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

He shook his head. "Too far for wagons moving this slowly, but perhaps Goru plans to camp at some point along the way and continue on horseback. Or perhaps this is a shortcut. It's hard to tell by the map."

Magda said firmly, "Trust Goru. He fought with Yugoslav partisans during the second world war, he can be very cunning." She turned to Mrs. Pollifax with a shy smile. "You have already trusted me—you have not asked why I go to Scotland. If I get away."

Mrs. Pollifax laughed softly. "But I knew you would explain if you chose to!"

Magda nodded. "Hugh has a hunting lodge there. If I succeed in getting to London I will send one cable to Washington from the airport and then I shall disappear again. You understand I shall be very stubborn until Dmitri is allowed to join me."

Mrs. Pollifax considered this and nodded. She supposed that one small boy could very easily be overlooked or ignored by governments once they were satisfied, and that even Carstairs could be rendered impotent by a government. "A little friendly persuasion," she said, nodding. "Yes, I understand. I won't ask for the address."

"Thank you."

The wagons jolted and bounced and creaked, it was very like their journey the night before, the cold following a day of heat, the same stars overhead, same sounds of muffled voices. But the radiance of the hidden moon gave an almost Biblical quality to the procession of primitive wagons moving across the austere, harsh countryside. The earth here was called *tuff*, Colin said, composed of ashes and mud and rock; there were no trees, its only fruit was the rocks, and there were so many of these that at times it became necessary to climb down from the wagons and lift them over boulders.

Sometime around two o'clock the line stopped and rough bread and jugs of water were distributed while Goru walked up and down the line checking wheels and axles on the carts. No one spoke above a whisper and the line moved on again soon. It was incredible country: the moonlight picked out whole forests of needle-shaped rock, a valley of rock chimneys arising white under the moon, a cluster of cone-shaped hovels like beehives.

It was four o'clock in the morning when word swept up and down the procession that they were being followed by a man on horseback. For

the first time Mrs. Pollifax realized that Goru had scouts ahead and behind them but this realization came late to reassure her. The news of a pursuer struck her as inexplicable and ominous.

"It could be Sebastien," Colin said hopefully.

"Sebastien," repeated Mrs. Pollifax, remembering Yozgat. "Yes, it could be Sebastien," she said politely.

"One person on horseback is scarcely a threat to some thirty gypsies," Colin pointed out. "Why doesn't Goru stop and find out who it is?" He jumped down. "I'll walk ahead and ask."

He was back several minutes later wearing a frown. "Whoever it is he stays behind us at some distance. It was thought a coincidence at first—someone's trail crossing ours—but the rider takes the same turns, the same trails. Goru says there isn't time to stop, it's half-past four and the important thing is getting Magda to the aerodrome before eight."

"Quite so," Mrs. Pollifax said with feeling.

But uneasiness permeated the caravan. The line moved faster, and when a wagon needed help over the rocks there were sharp words exchanged. Yet whoever followed showed no sign of moving closer to them. Nothing changed except the sky, which was whitening with dawn, and the terrain which grew flatter as the rocks thinned. They were leaving the volcanic country behind them and returning to the flat and dusty Anatolian plateau. Somewhere on this plateau, between them and the foothills of the high mountains in the distance, lay Kayseri and the airport.

"How far now?" asked Mrs. Pollifax of Colin.

"I don't know," he said shortly.

"Then what time is it?"

"A few minutes after five."

As he said this Goru lifted his hand and called out a sharp command from the front, the sound of his voice startling after so many hours of caution. In the east the sky had turned into mother-of-pearl and the tip of an orange sun was lifting itself over the peak of the mountains. Goru was waving them to a halt because two men on horseback were approaching them from the north.

"They're in uniform," Mrs. Pollifax said as they drew closer, not hurrying but keeping their horses to a steady walk.

"The constabulary," Colin said shortly. "Rural police."

"Oh," said Mrs. Pollifax.

The two men rode up to Goru, their faces not unfriendly. They looked pleasant, relaxed, two men on normal patrol. For a few minutes they exchanged words with Goru and then, while one man continued idly conversing, the other rode slowly up and down the wagon line looking into

the faces of the gypsies and glancing over and into the wagons. He rode back and the three-way conversation continued endlessly. Goru nodded and stood up, calling out to the gypsies.

Casually Sandor strolled back to them from Anyeta's wagon in which he was riding. He said, "They wish to see all identity cards."

"But this is going to take a long time!" said Mrs. Pollifax despairingly.

"Yes."

"Why the devil can't we just tie them up and take them along?" asked Colin irritably. "I still have Stefan's pistol!"

Sandor grinned. "What a lion you are! You wish them to know we have something to hide? When a police sees gypsies he either spits and rides on, or stops to see what they have stolen today. Please, a sense of dimension!"

"I think he means perspective," Magda said with a wry smile as she handed Sandor the card of *Nimet Aziz*. Mrs. Pollifax parted with *Yurgadil* and Colin with *Nazmi*, and Sandor carried them back to the police.

There followed an interminable wait, tense with anxiety lest the police ask to question each gypsy personally and discover that three of them were frauds. The police talked on and on while one of them shuffled through the pile of thirty cards, speaking sometimes to Goru or to Anyeta, sometimes to each other. Once they laughed—"Are they telling *jokes*?" whispered Colin indignantly—and then at last the papers were handed back to Goru and the wagons were waved ahead.

But they had been stopped for more than forty-five minutes, and it was now nearly six. Mrs. Pollifax was beginning to wonder if Magda could possibly reach the aerodrome in the two hours remaining to them. Her doubts were silent but she sensed that it was a question that hung suspended over the whole caravan as it moved forward. As for the two policemen, they had ridden off at a gallop and nothing could be seen of them but a cloud of dust.

"*Now* they hurry," said Colin bitterly. "Do you think we passed inspection?"

Mrs. Pollifax said tartly, "It depends on what they were looking for. If they were looking specifically for gypsies then they found them—and also did a brilliant job of slowing us down."

They were tired, hungry and dusty now, but they were apparently nearing a more civilized area: half an hour later they skirted a small village of a dozen buildings steaming in the early morning sun and threaded their way between vineyards into bare fields again. Sandor walked back to them with a new message from Anyeta.

"Goru wishes the wagons to go two-by-two now, one beside the

other. This wagon will move next to his." He translated this to Yule, and their wagon bypassed the others and drew abreast of Anyeta and Goru.

Leaning over between wagons Anyeta said, "You must stay close to Magda now." There was a mute warning in her eyes for Mrs. Pollifax. "Very close, you understand?"

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. What did Anyeta see? Of what was she afraid? But it was not only Anyeta: Goru stood up, bracing himself, and tossed a club to Yule across the wagons and followed this with a string bag that contained of all things perfectly round, small rocks.

And then Mrs. Pollifax understood: she too heard the helicopter. As she looked up it came darting over the swelling hill ahead of them, delicate, small, yet monstrous, like a blown-up metallic dragonfly.

"So we are to meet the good doctor again," said Colin grimly. "But he's a fool this time! What can he do against so many of us?"

Mrs. Pollifax did not reply. Dr. Belleaux might be many things but he was not a fool. She looked around her thoughtfully. Behind them lay the vineyards. Ahead, to their right, a village graveyard populated a gently sloping, treeless hill. She could see nothing, but her skin prickled uneasily.

Into this the helicopter descended, sending clouds of dust into their eyes. Mrs. Pollifax coughed and ducked her head, drawing her shawl over her nose and eyes. When she peered through a slit of the shawl she saw the helicopter resting lightly on the ground some forty yards away, its blades still whirring, its dust almost blanketing them all. "Why the devil doesn't he turn that blasted machine off!" cried Colin, jumping down. "Get under the wagon or behind it or you'll be blinded by the dust!" he shouted, and held out a hand to Magda and Mrs. Pollifax.

Goru was shouting orders. Everyone seemed to be shouting to someone else. The door of the helicopter opened and Dr. Belleaux and Stefan jumped down with pistols. From somewhere on the right a gun was fired—it came from the graveyard on the hill, realized Mrs. Pollifax and now she understood Dr. Belleaux's confidence: he had not come alone, he had at last joined forces with the Turkish police.

"*Mon dieu!*" cried Magda as the graveyard came to life and the police began pouring down the hill.

But they were still some distance away, and Mrs. Pollifax realized why Dr. Belleaux had left the engine alive on the helicopter: he had arrived but he was facing the gypsies for these few minutes with only his gun and Stefan's. She saw his uneasiness, his uncertainty, his determination to remain just beside the door of the helicopter lest a quick retreat prove necessary. Goru too, saw this and suddenly appeared from

behind the plane. With a club he knocked the gun from Dr. Belleaux's hand.

Stefan whirled on him but at once other gypsies swept forward to surround them. Yule was knocked flat—Stefan was not an incompetent bodyguard—and a club flew into the air.

"To the vineyard! Hide in the vineyard!" shouted Anyeta from her wagon. "Quickly!"

"She's right—hurry!" cried Colin, tugging at her arm.

But Mrs. Pollifax shook her head. There was no future for them hiding in a vineyard, and the police had broken into a run as they crossed the fields. They would be here in a minute or two—three at the most—and it would be the finish for them. Magda would never reach the aerodrome, or her eight o'clock plane to freedom. Instead she was staring at the helicopter, momentarily abandoned and unguarded. It was a small miracle: how often did miracles such as this occur? She said, "Colin, can you fly a helicopter?"

He gaped at her. "God no!"

Magda threw back her head and laughed. "Mrs. Pollifax, you are irrepressible! Do you really think—"

"There's no other way," Mrs. Pollifax said firmly, and began to run, dragging Magda with her.

Colin hesitated, looked helplessly around him, then at the two fleeing women, and followed. Together they ran at break-neck speed around and through the melee of fist-fighters to reach the door of the helicopter. Mrs. Pollifax boosted Magda inside, pulled herself up and turned to give Colin a hand. At the same moment they were seen by the approaching police. A shot was fired and Colin fell back.

"Go!" he shouted. "Go!"

"Of course not!" cried Mrs. Pollifax, still clinging to his hand, and dragged him bodily over the threshold. "Bolt the doors!" she told Magda. "Keep everybody out!"

"But can you drive a helicopter?" asked Magda, leaning across Colin and bolting the doors.

Mrs. Pollifax snapped, "Of course not!" and sat down and looked at the levers. There were two of them, one jutting straight up from the floor, the other running parallel to her leg from behind the seat. She grasped the latter, closed her eyes, said a prayer, and pulled. The helicopter gave a little jump—they were still alive. Heartened, she grasped the second lever and thrust it forward and they hovered several feet from the ground, going nowhere but considerably frightening the people around the plane, who began to scatter. Mrs. Pollifax tackled the levers more sternly, and with a leap they began moving sideways, threatening

to level gypsies as well as police. "Courage, Emily," she told herself, and returned to the first lever—and suddenly they were sailing over the heads of the gypsies and the police. "Well!" she gasped, and drew a breath of satisfaction. "Well!" she said, and only wished she could remember what she had done.

"Good God we're up," said Colin weakly.

"Be still, it's bloody but only a flesh wound," Magda told him. "Lie down!"

"Lie down?" Colin said. "Lie down when I've survived being shot only to be abducted in a helicopter flown by a madwoman? Mrs. Pollifax—"

"Ssh," she told him sternly. "Ssh—I'm driving this thing. Now where's the airport?" They were flying at low-level—in jumps, rather like a kangaroo—while Mrs. Pollifax tested levers, trying to find out which took them up, and which forward and sideways.

"Look out!" screamed Magda as they narrowly averted a tree.

The helicopter leaped, dropped, skimmed across a field almost on its side, turned, lifted and settled at a more conservative altitude. "I wish you would speak more quietly," Mrs. Pollifax said reprovingly. "When you shout in my ear I jump and so does my hand and so does the plane."

"Look—there's a highway!" Magda gasped, kneeling behind Mrs. Pollifax.

"Good we'll follow it," said Mrs. Pollifax. "Colin, what time is it?"

He braced an arm, lifted it and scowled at his watch. "Seven-fifteen."

Magda said, "You're too low, Mrs. Pollifax, we're going to hit the cars." Forgetting to be quiet she screamed, "Look out!"

The plane jumped. Cars scattered to left and to right. Mrs. Pollifax tugged at the first lever that met her hand and they zoomed heavenward. Shakily she said, "We badly need an airport."

"I'm looking, believe me," said Magda.

They flew over Kayseri—it had to be Kayseri—and barely missed the top of a minaret that rose like a needle in their path. "Up!" screamed Magda.

"They build them too high!" shouted Mrs. Pollifax peevishly, pulled the wrong lever and sent them moving crab-like back to the minaret. Furiously she tugged at another lever and they went skyward again.

"I see the airport!" cried Magda triumphantly, and there it was, a gloriously clear space a mile or two away decorated with runways and a control tower. "Watch those buildings!" Magda cried despairingly. "We're hovering!"

"I know we're hovering," cried Mrs. Pollifax, "but I can't seem to—" They shot abruptly forward, dropped low, then suddenly lower, the mo-

tor died and they came to rest on the ground. "I think we just ran out of gas," said Mrs. Pollifax. "Where are we?"

Magda said calmly, "We've just landed in the middle of Kayseri's public square, and barely missed a policeman directing traffic."

Mrs. Pollifax nodded and opened her eyes. "Yes, I see him," she said with a sigh. "A great many people seem to be looking at us, too."

From the floor of the helicopter Colin said, "Then get moving! Run! Grab a taxi! Leave the rest to me!"

He was quite right, of course. Mrs. Pollifax opened the door next to her, which was happily furthest from the policeman, slid out, extended a hand to Magda and they jumped down. For just a moment they stood hand in hand, blinking a little at the gathering crowd, then with pleasant nods and smiles they made their way to the sidewalk, allowed the crowd to stream past them, and casually slipped down a side street to look for a taxi.

"Head for the ladies room," Mrs. Pollifax told Magda. "Don't wait for me—two of us might draw attention. Go in, peel off your Turkish clothes and bundle them into a wastebasket."

It was precisely 7:35 as they entered the air terminal, and as she saw Magda escape into the ladies room Mrs. Pollifax looked around her and became aware of how they must look to the civilized world following their trip across Turkey by bus, car, wagon and helicopter. She moved humbly into a corner and waited.

Ten minutes later there emerged from the ladies room a thin, erect and distinguished-looking woman with head high, eyes alert and navy knit suit only slightly askew. Mrs. Pollifax smiled approvingly. Magda walked to the flight desk and with exquisite aplomb drew out bills from the shawl she carried over one arm. Several minutes later she reached Passport Control and held out her passport with confidence. The official took it, looked deeply into Magda's face, showed it to his companion officer, stamped it and with a nod returned it.

Not until she reached the door did Magda turn, her glance sweeping the lobby. When she saw Mrs. Pollifax in her dusty baggy pants and shawl her mouth curved slightly. They exchanged a long expressionless glance and then almost imperceptibly Magda lifted one hand in a gesture that could have been a wave or a salute.

It was now 7:55. Mrs. Pollifax moved to the window and watched Magda board the plane, watched the hands of the clock tick away five minutes, saw the stairs removed, the door closed, watched the plane begin to taxi down the runway. It stopped at the beginning of the long runway. "Go, go, go," whispered Mrs. Pollifax. The plane hesitated and

then began to move again. As its wheels lifted Mrs. Pollifax slowly expelled her breath, and there were tears in her eyes.

Magda was airborne.

She turned and walked the length of the terminal to the front door. She did not falter when she saw the crowds gathering there, nor flinch at sight of police hurrying inside and barking out orders to the crowd of porters and tourists. As she drew nearer one of the police looked up and saw her and stepped forward.

"Mrs. Pollifax?" he said.

She sighed and nodded. Behind him she saw Dr. Belleaux stepping out of a car. He wore a strip of adhesive across one cheek but aside from this he looked his usual cool, authoritative self.

"You are wanted for questioning in the murder of Henry Miles," he said. "Come with us, please."

CHAPTER 18

HER CELL WAS SMALL, MADE OF STONE AND VERY OLD BUT NOT AT all picturesque or pleasant. In fact it smelled. It had been cold and damp when she entered it at half-past eight, and then as the day progressed it became damp and hot with a sticky jungle humidity. There was a jug of water in one corner of the cell but no one brought food; no one came near her at all, for any purpose whatever, and this alarmed her because she had expected to tell her story to the police at once. Now she had no idea of what was happening, or of how much damage Dr. Belleaux might be doing while she was imprisoned here. She knew that Magda's plane had safely left—she had seen this for herself—but Magda could have been intercepted at Ankara or Istanbul, and might very easily be sitting in a cell now, too. The thought of such a defeat appalled her.

The hours crawled by, each of them bringing their own hell of doubt. Was Magda still on the plane? Was she even alive? Did Dr. Belleaux possess the Evil Eye by now? The very fact that no one came to her cell made her wonder if Dr. Belleaux was not exercising a great deal of authority; it was he who could least afford her communicating with anyone in charge here.

But if only *someone* would come! It was maddening to sit here charged with such a small, sad and truthless crime when she had news so explosive, and worries so alarming.

Toward noon she began to pace her cell, staring in exasperation at the tiny window high in the wall, or standing by the door in the hope of hearing footsteps outside. There was nothing. The day grew hotter and the walls of her cell began to literally sweat, the moisture running down and dropping with a soft *phfft* on the stones. Just in case her cell was wired she took to saying in a clear voice every thirty minutes, "I must talk to someone in charge, I have information for the Turkish govern-

ment." No one came, no one listened, there was only heat and silence. After a number of hours Mrs. Pollifax ceased her pacing and wearily sat down on the metal bunk, feeling very depressed and extremely hungry.

She had completely lost track of time when the door to her cell suddenly opened. The light had grown dimmer — it must be late afternoon, she guessed — and it was difficult to see more than the outline of the man, who said briskly, "I am sorry, Mrs. Pollifax! There has been no time to interview you, and you have had a long wait indeed. You will come with me please to a" — she heard him sniff — "more agreeable place."

"Yes," she said in a dispirited voice.

He led her down a long, dimly lit dungeon of a corridor and up worn stairs to a more civilized hall. At an open door he turned to wait for her. "In here, please," he said. It was a beautiful door—pure mahogany — and she realized that she was being ushered into an office. It was a vast improvement. There was sunshine in the room, as well as fresh air, and much more mahogany. Only the bars across the windows reminded her that she was still in prison.

She sat down in a leather chair beside his desk and now that her eyes were becoming accustomed to the light she examined the man with some surprise. "We've met before," she said abruptly.

"Yes," he said, sitting down and smiling pleasantly at her. "In Istanbul, at Central Headquarters. I am Mr. Piskapos."

"Of course," she said, recalling the man in plainclothes who had remained beside the window, scarcely speaking. "May I ask how Mr. Ramsey is? Mr. Colin Ramsey?"

"Oh yes, the young man found in the helicopter." He nodded. "Just a flesh wound, quite negligible."

"Has he—uh—spoken with you?"

Mr. Piskapos smiled at her with interest. "Now what would he speak to me about, Mrs. Pollifax, eh?" He leaned over and flicked on the switch of a tape recorder. "Have some figs," he said, holding out to her a polished wooden bowl of fruit. "I must question you of many matters. Food will be brought you soon, but you must be very hungry."

"Thank you," she said, and accepted a fig and held it — it was a very sticky fig. She realized that after all these hours of waiting she had finally acquired someone to speak to, and she no longer had any idea of what to say. She could not think of any questions that might not provoke graver dangers for Magda — or Dmitri — or Colin and his uncle, or the gypsies, or even herself; nor of any answers that would not betray her connection with Mr. Carstairs and his organization.

"But let us get on with this," said Mr. Piskapos, and added calmly, "I

am a member of the Turkish Intelligence, Mrs. Pollifax, and so you may speak frankly with me. You are an American agent, are you not?"

She shook her head. "You flatter me, Mr. Piskapos, I am an American tourist."

He nodded. "Then let us not pursue *that* detail any further."

"Thank you," she said with dignity. "Then may I ask—"

"Surely not why you've been incarcerated," he said with a mocking smile.

"On the contrary, I would like to ask what charges you plan to place against me."

"Any charges would be purely academic since your trial has already taken place," he said flatly.

"My trial?" she gasped. "Without me?"

He nodded. "Perhaps the word trial is a poor word, Mrs. Pollifax – the Intelligence department does not have trials. Let us say instead that a hearing has been held—it took a number of hours, which is why I am so late—and you were quite fairly represented, Mrs. Pollifax."

"Indeed?" she said coldly. "And by whom?"

"By Lieutenant Cevdet Suleiman."

She said indignantly, "I've never met a Lieutenant Suleiman, nor has any such man spoken to me, so that I fail to see how he could represent me. This was doubtless a recommendation of Dr. Belleaux?"

Mr. Piskapos beamed. "It is interesting to hear you mention Dr. Belleaux's name," he said. "Supposing you tell me how you happen to know Dr. Belleaux."

"What time is it?"

"Five o'clock." He leaned across the desk and displayed his wrist watch to her in case she doubted him.

Mrs. Pollifax hesitated and then nodded. If it was five o'clock in the afternoon then Magda was either safe or not safe, either landing in London or stalled hopelessly in Istanbul. In any case Carstairs could be left out of the picture: the important thing was to place Dr. Belleaux squarely *in* the picture. "Very well," she said, and began to speak of her arrival in Istanbul to help a friend who had appealed to her for aid by cablegram. "Her name," she said carefully, "was Magda Ferenci-Sabo."

If Mr. Piskapos was startled he did not show it; his eyes remained fixed inscrutably upon the blotter on his desk, he did not even blink.

Thus encouraged, Mrs. Pollifax plunged ahead to describe the events of the past four days. She left out very little except the names of Madrali, the Inglescus, and Sandor. When she had finished Mr. Piskapos flicked off the tape recorder.

"Thank you, Mrs. Pollifax," he said simply.

She found this annoyingly casual. She said, "Thank you for what? The truth? Lies? You don't believe what I've said about Dr. Belleaux?"

At her question he looked up, surprised. "Oh yes."

Jarred, she said, "Yes what?"

He smiled. "Perhaps I should tell you now that Dr. Belleaux is also in this prison—but not as a guest of our police this time. He was captured and booked only an hour after you arrived here, and he is here as a prisoner charged with espionage and treason." He smiled wryly. "At the hearing it was decided because of this, and because of your work in exposing Dr. Belleaux—that Ferenci-Sabo be allowed to continue unmolested to London."

"Magda is safe?" gasped Mrs. Pollifax.

He said gravely, "We could have stopped her, you understand, but in this particular case the Biblical eye for an eye seemed just. In time, all of her information will be shared with my government, and in turn we have Dr. Belleaux, as Lieutenant Suleiman pointed out to us."

"This lieutenant," began Mrs. Pollifax.

"However, for the safety of everyone concerned," continued Mr. Piskapos, "we have thought it best that if Alice Dexter White goes free, Magda Ferenci-Sabo must die. Die firmly, and publicly." He drew a sheet of paper from under his blotter. "Perhaps you would be interested in the news release we have prepared for the voice wire services?"

Mrs. Pollifax glanced impatiently at a report of Magda Ferenci-Sabo's death. Piskapos was saying, "You will of course wish to send a cable of reassurance to your superior, Mr. Carstairs, in Washington."

At hearing Carstairs' name spoken Mrs. Pollifax nearly choked on the fig that she had at last begun to eat. "You know about Mr. Carstairs?" she gasped.

Piskapos laughed. "Obviously it is time that you met Cevdet," he said. He leaned back and smiled at Mrs. Pollifax. "I must explain to you that Lieutenant Suleiman had been lately involved in following a man who entered Turkey illegally, Mrs. Pollifax, and who took a job as valet in the employ of a most noted gentleman in Istanbul to spy on that gentleman, we thought. The name of the man whom Lieutenant Suleiman was keeping under surveillance was Stefan Mihailic, and the gentleman who gave him employment is Dr. Guillaume Belleaux."

Mrs. Pollifax's eyes widened in surprise. "Dr. Belleaux!"

"Which may explain to you," continued Mr. Piskapos dryly, "how it was that Lieutenant Suleiman happened to be watching Dr. Belleaux's house last Monday night when two strangers rode up in a van containing a corpse, proceeded to burglarize Dr. Belleaux's house and then to carry out a half-conscious woman! Without consulting his superiors—

but the man is a genius, of course Lieutenant Suleiman decided that he must follow you in whatever conveyance he could put his hands on and discover what on earth you were up to. He had no idea who you or Ferenci-Sabo were until –alas—it was far too late." Piskapos smiled. "He seems to have acquired the utmost respect for you, Mrs. Pollifax, a respect, I might add, which my government now shares completely."

He leaned over and said into the intercom, "Send in Cevdet, please."

"I am bewildered," admitted Mrs. Pollifax. "I may be overtired but I simply don't understand."

Mr. Piskapos beamed at her reassuringly. "You will have plenty of time to understand. Lieutenant Suleiman has arranged a party for you all tonight in Ankara . . . for you, the young man Colin, Mr. Ramsey and Dmitri who are already in Ankara now—and I believe something was mentioned of a pretty young woman from Yozgat. But Lieutenant Suleiman will tell you more of this. Ah, come in, Cevdet, come in!"

The door had opened. A figure in dazzling white linen stood there, a figure vaguely familiar and yet—paradoxically—utterly strange to Mrs. Pollifax. Black hair. A thin stripe of a moustache across the upper lip. Dazzling white teeth. Broad shoulders. This was an incredibly handsome man. Then he moved, and Mrs. Pollifax started. Dimly she remembered thinking was it only a few days ago? that even if he shaved and bathed she would recognize him because of his vitality, that bounding step and wonderful zest for life.

"Sandor!" she cried.

Mr. Piskapos stood up and said with a smile, "I would like you to meet Lieutenant Cevdet Suleiman, Mrs. Pollifax, of Turkish Intelligence."

Sandor laughed delightedly. "What the hell, eh, Mrs. Pollifax?" he said, and bounded forward to kiss her heartily on each cheek.

CHAPTER 19

It was Saturday afternoon in Langley, Virginia, and in his office in the CIA building Carstairs had been staring at a small exhibit on his desk.

There was a hat that had been airmailed to him from Istanbul, discovered by the police on Wednesday in a street bazaar in Ankara. It was a veritable garden of a hat bearing the label of Mrs. Emily Pollifax of New Brunswick, New Jersey, but he had already known this: he had seen it himself on Mrs. Pollifax's head six days ago.

There was Bishop's memo from Pan American Airways stating that no Mrs. Emily Pollifax was aboard today's flight out of Istanbul for London.

There was the wire release torn from the teletype machine with the bulletin that would be tomorrow morning's headline. It was dated Kayseri July 10, and it reported the body of a woman identified as Magda Ferenci-Sabo discovered by a shepherd that morning, near Ürgüp in central Turkey.

And there was the cable that Bishop had handed him only a moment ago, and which Carstairs had just begun to read:

> REGRET TO INFORM YOU MAGDA DEAD STOP ALICE DEXTER WHITE IN GOOD HEALTH AND RESUMING TRAVELS STOP PLEASE HAVE READY UPON ARRIVAL PASSPORT FOR DMITRI DEXTER WHITE AGE ELEVEN STOP DELAYING DEPARTURE TWENTY-FOUR HOURS FOR PARTY GIVEN MY HONOR ANKARA STOP HAVING WONDERFUL TIME EMILY POLLIFAX.

Carstairs read it again incredulously. "I don't believe it," he said in a stunned voice.

Bishop chuckled. "It leaves out so much, don't you think? Such as where she's been for almost a week, and who killed Henry, and how she lost her hat, not to mention her rescuing Ferenci-Sabo—"

Carstairs said incredulously, "What did she do? How did she manage it? I thought she was dead. I thought they were both dead "

" 'O ye of little faith,' " said Bishop with a grin.

Carstairs shook his head unbelievingly. "No word from Dr. Belleaux. Two agents already murdered. This hat turning up in Ankara of all places—and her passport. How did she get clear across Turkey without a passport?"

Bishop's grin broadened. "What interests me at the moment is who's giving the party in Mrs. Pollifax's honor. The Turkish government, do you suppose?"

"Don't be an idiot," snapped Carstairs, and then as his glance fell to the cable he began to smile. "I'll amend that," he said. "Anything's possible."

He read the cable a third time, and as it dawned upon him at last that Ferenci-Sabo and Pollifax were both safe and he had lost a great deal of sleep over them the past several nights—he chuckled richly. "Bishop," he said, "find out what twenty-four hours' delay does to Mrs. Pollifax's arrival. She was booked on Pan Am all the way, wasn't she? I believe I'll meet her plane personally on Monday."

"Yes, sir. There's one other matter, sir."

"What's that, Bishop?"

"May I come, too, sir?"

MRS. POLLIFAX ON SAFARI

For Marjorie Bell Fritz

I would like to thank Mr. Xen Vlahakis and Ms. Jeanne Harris of the Zambia National Tourist Bureau in New York for their generous help in providing material about Zambia, none of which included the Moses Msonthi School, which is purely fictional and does not exist.

CHAPTER 1

IT WAS BARELY EIGHT O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING WHEN THE TELEphone call came in from Algiers, but Carstairs was already at his desk high up in the CIA building in Langley, Virginia. With his left hand he switched on a tape recorder, with his right he buzzed for his assistant while he listened with narrowed eyes. At one point he interrupted, saying, "Mind repeating that?" and scribbled several words on paper. When Bishop hurried into the office the call had just been completed.

"Sorry," Bishop said breathlessly, "I was in the men's room, sir. I've missed something?"

"You have every right to be in the men's room," Carstairs told him reproachfully, "but you've missed an important call from Algiers. We may—just *may*, Bishop—have the first whisper of a breakthrough on the Aristotle case."

"Good God," said Bishop, staring at him incredulously. "After all these months?"

"It's possible. Remember that fabric shop that Davis' department placed under surveillance in Algiers? The stolen bank-note job," he added helpfully. "Bennet photographed some messages that were left out on a desk overnight and he decided, bless him, that one of them would interest us very much. Bright lad, Bennet. The cables and memos were in French and Arabic and he's only just finished translating them." Carstairs reached over and turned on the tape recorder. "Here we are," he said, and accelerating and then slowing the machine, he signaled to Bishop to take the words down in shorthand.

They both listened carefully as Bennet's clipped voice told them, "The original message, translated from the French, reads as follows: CONFIRM ORDER SEVENTY YARDS BLACK ARISTOTLE SILKS TO ZAMBIA THREE BOLTS COTTON DUE KAFUE PARK TWO BOLTS CHUNGA MUSLIN

TEN YARDS FIVE-DAY SAFARI DESIGN CHINTZ DELIVERABLE JUNE NINE REPEAT CONFIRM RE-CONFIRM. CHABO."

"Right," said Bishop, puzzled. "Any more?"

"Yes, if you've got that down." Carstairs pressed the button and the voice resumed . . . "and when the clutter words have been extracted from the fabric order, using their usual decoding technique, the message becomes: CONFIRM ARISTOTLE TO ZAMBIA DUE KAFUE PARK CHUNGA FIVE-DAY SAFARI ON JUNE NINE REPEAT CONFIRM RE-CONFIRM. CHABO."

"Beautiful," said Bishop with feeling.

"I rather like it myself," said Carstairs. "Very promising indeed."

"Aristotle," Bishop mused, and shook his head. "I'd really begun to believe the man invisible, you know. All these assassinations and no one's ever noticed him in the crowd or come up with a description. How does he do it? It took us four months just to learn he has a code name and he's still a faceless, nameless Mr. X."

"He may have the reputation of being invisible," said Carstairs, "but damn it he's not supernatural." He pulled an atlas and a pile of maps from his desk drawer and began sorting through them. "Eventually *somebody's* had to refer to him through channels accessible to us, and it's possible that finally, at long last—" He pushed aside the atlas and began on the maps. "Here we are," he said abruptly. "Take a look at this. Central Africa in detail."

The two men bent over the map of Zambia and Carstairs pointed. "There's Kafue National Park, twenty-two thousand five hundred square kilometers in size, six hundred varieties of game. Note the names of the safari camps."

Bishop read aloud, "Ngomo, Moshi, Kafwala and Chunga." He glanced at Bennet's message and nodded. "*Due Kafue Park Chunga* . . . Chunga camp, that would mean. I must say it's a rare day when something falls this neatly into our laps."

"It hasn't yet," Carstairs reminded him, "but it's certainly an exhilarating possibility." He leaned back in his chair, his face thoughtful. "We do know a few things about our mysterious Aristotle. We know first of all that he's a mercenary, up for hire to whoever bids the highest price . . . Look at his record: Malaga was a Liberal in Costa Rican politics, and Messague in France was a Communist. There was that British chap—Hastings, wasn't it?—who was making some headway in Ireland on negotiations when he was assassinated, and the colonel in Peru whose politics were strictly middle-of-the-road, and then of course there was Pete." His fact tightened. "Our agents may be fair game these days,

but no man deserves to be shot as he walks out of church with a bride on his arm."

"No, sir," said Bishop. "However, there's just one point "

"Something bothering you?"

Bishop was frowning. "Very much so, now that I've caught my breath. What I mean is, a safari? An assassin going on *safari*?"

"We also know," continued Carstairs, appearing to ignore this, "that Aristotle is intelligent, he has a strong instinct for survival, and he's a complete loner or someone would have talked long ago. Tell me, Bishop," he said, leaning forward and pointing a pencil at him, "if you were Aristotle, how would you negotiate your assignments? How would you make contact with your next employer?"

"How would I " Bishop was silent, considering this. "Russian tea-house?" he said at last, flippantly. "Turkish bath? A funicular railway in the Swiss Alps? I see your point, sir. Tricky. Very, very tricky, and probably a hell of a lot more dangerous for him than actually shooting down politicians."

"Exactly. It's this touch that encourages me very much. Damned clever idea, choosing a safari, it's perfect for a rendezvous. He'd have the chance to look over his potential employer before identifying himself, and then it gives them both plenty of leisure to haggle over terms and price. He'd be far removed from cities, with access to a wide area in case negotiations blow up, and what better protective cover than a small group moving through remote bush country? The man definitely has a flair for the artistic."

"You sound as if you're painting a portrait."

"One has to," Carstairs pointed out, "and then crawl inside it and puzzle out what he'll do next, and at that stage you've pretty well got your man, Bishop."

"Do we share this with Interpol?"

Carstairs shook his head. "No, definitely not. We first insert one of our own people into that safari. If we can pin down this man, find out what he looks like, identify him, learn where he comes from "

"Not catch him?" said Bishop, startled.

Carstairs looked amused. "My dear Bishop, would you have us ask the Republic of Zambia to arrest everyone on next Monday's safari? And on what charge? Uh-uh. This calls for the purest kind of old-fashioned intelligence-gathering, and don't underestimate it."

"I never have, sir," Bishop said meekly.

"In fact, if you consider the world's population at this given moment," pointed out Carstairs, "you can understand how it narrows the field if Aristotle turns up at Kafue Park next Monday and we capture photo-

graphs of everyone on the safari. Instead of looking for a needle in a haystack, we'll have pictures of perhaps a dozen people to sort through, identify, trace and verify. Exposure does wonders for invisible men," he added dryly, "and Interpol can take it from there. What's the date today?"

"June first."

Carstairs nodded. "We've got to move fast, then. We've barely time to find the right agent and get him over there. Set up the computer, Bishop, will you? We'll run through the possibilities."

"It'll only take a minute, sir." Bishop walked over to the closet where the machine they referred to as the Monster was housed. He punched MASTER LIST, fiddled with knobs, fed it classifications like *Africa, Zambia* and *Tourist* and called to his superior. "Here you are, sir. Beginning with A, right down to Z."

"Always reminds me of a damn slot machine," growled Carstairs, gazing up at the screen with its myriads of blinking lights, and then he said, "John Sebastian Farrell! What the hell's he doing on this list when he hasn't worked for us in three years?"

Bishop, who had a memory to equal any computer, said, "Hmmm . . . Well, I could hazard a guess, sir. In that letter of resignation he sent us three years ago from South America scrawled, if I remember correctly, on a torn sheet of wrapping paper—he said he was off to Africa to reclaim his soul or some such thing, and we could send any sums owed him to Farrell, care of Barclay's Bank, Lusaka, Zambia."

Carstairs frowned. "Something about cleaner air and a cleaner life, wasn't it? That still doesn't explain what he's doing on the computer list."

"A mistake, I think." Bishop left the computer, went to the phone, dialed a number and rattled questions into it. When he hung up he looked pleased. "Called Bookkeeping, sir. They tell me they've been regularly mailing Farrell's pension checks to Zambia for three years, and apparently that's what the computer picked up. They're terribly sorry and his name is being removed at once."

"He's still there? Those checks are being cashed?"

"That's what they tell me."

"Farrell," said Carstairs musingly, and returned to his desk and sat down. "Damn it, Bishop," he said, scowling, "I've known Farrell since OSS days, he worked for this department for fifteen years, yet why is it I can no longer think of Farrell without thinking of Emily Pollifax?"

Bishop laughed. "That was her first assignment, wasn't it? After she'd turned up in Mason's office to naïvely apply for work as a spy?

And you'd been looking for a cozy grandmotherly type for your courier job and you took her on, and when all hell broke loose you thought —"

"I know what I thought," Carstairs said, cutting him off, and suddenly grinned. "Do you remember, Bishop? When it was all over they sat right here in this office. Farrell was in bandages, looking like death itself, and Mrs. Pollifax was in that damn Albanian goatherder's outfit . . . they'd just been pulled out of the Adriatic and I'd given her up for dead, I'd given them both up for dead—and she sat here pulling rabbits out of a hat—"

"Out of her petticoats, wasn't it?" said Bishop, smiling.

" and it turned out that a complete amateur had duped all the professionals." He stopped smiling and said abruptly, "Mrs. Pollifax, of course."

Bishop, reading his mind, was shocked. "Tangling with a cold-blooded assassin, sir?"

"She's tangled with them before," pointed out Carstairs, "but this time she doesn't have to tangle with anyone at all, just take photographs. Most of these safaris nowadays are camera-shooting, not hunting safaris, and there'll be cameras in everybody's pocket."

"Maybe," said Bishop grudgingly, and then, smiling. "Of course she'd be marvelous at it. Ingenuous, artless, the sort everyone confides in . . . Do you think Aristotle might confide in her, too?"

Carstairs gave him a sour glance. "Try not to be naïve, Bishop," and then as his gaze moved to the clock, "She'll need a yellow-fever shot and someone will have to pull some strings to get her a visa in a hurry, and if that safari's booked solid there'll have to be more strings pulled, although thank heaven it's early June and not the high season yet in Africa. Bishop—"

Bishop sighed. "New York, I suppose?"

"Right. Get the first plane over and start things moving. The Zambia National Tourist Bureau's on Fifty-eighth Street, I think, and so is the embassy that will produce the visa. While you're phoning about a plane reservation I'll call Mrs. Pollifax and see if she can take this on. God, let's hope so," he said fervently. "After your business in New York you can go on to New Jersey and brief her."

"Right. Oh, by the way," said Bishop, pausing at the door. "If she's available do I mention Farrell being in Zambia?"

Carstairs considered this judiciously. "You'd better, I suppose, just in case—heaven forbid—they accidentally bump into each other at the wrong time. It could give the whole show away." He hesitated and then added, "Hold on a moment." Smiling almost mischievously, he said, "I'll go even further. Ask her to give Farrell a ring on the telephone when she

arrives in Lusaka. He must be in the book. There might not be time for a reunion before her safari, but they could certainly get together afterward."

Bishop looked at him curiously. "That's a bit unusual, isn't it?"

"Highly irregular but also crafty," admitted Carstairs. "I'd like to know how our old friend Farrell is doing. Damn it, Bishop, I miss that man," he said indignantly. "I can name half a dozen jobs in the past three years he would have done a hell of a lot better than anyone else. He must be bored to death with retirement."

"It's possible," said Bishop.

"Of course it's possible. Definitely get her to Lusaka early, Bishop, and ask her to look him up before she flutters about photographing everyone on safari. Now go away and let me tackle Mrs. Pollifax before she slips through our fingers. . . ."

At that particular moment Mrs. Pollifax was standing in the middle of her living room practicing the karate on-guard stance. One could never be too prepared, she thought, adjusting her balance so that her weight was placed equally on both feet, and when this had been accomplished she curled each hand into a fist and attempted a quick horizontal slash. More than this she dared not risk. Lorvale, her instructor, was currently enthusiastic about attacking with blood-curdling shouts of *"Ki-ya!"* but it seemed reasonable to suppose that this would bring her neighbors down upon her head.

The telephone began ringing and Mrs. Pollifax reluctantly disengaged her stance to answer it. She could tell at once from the rustling sounds in the background that the call was long distance. A muffled voice said, "Hold please," and then a familiar one said, "Carstairs here. Mrs. Pollifax, could you leave for Africa this weekend?"

Mrs. Pollifax reflected that karate did help; this somewhat startling query did not unbalance her at all. "Yes, I think I could," she told him. "How *are* you, Mr. Carstairs?"

"Understaffed and terribly busy," he snapped. "You did say yes?"

"It slipped out," she said, "but if I can find someone to water my geraniums, yes I could go to Africa this weekend."

"Then start looking," he said, his voice a shade less harassed. "Although not for a few hours, because Bishop's on his way to New York, or will be in a few minutes. He'll make all the arrangements for you. Who's your doctor?"

Startled, she told him.

"Good. Bishop will be around to see you. Sometime between one and two o'clock?"

"Either will be fine," she told him, hung up and at once felt a shock tremor move inch by inch down her spine to her toes. *What* had possessed her to say yes? She couldn't possibly leave for Africa this weekend, the idea was preposterous. Africa was halfway around the world and one prepared cautiously for such a trip, announcing it to friends, reading guidebooks, making lists in advance. That was how her neighbor Miss Hartshorne traveled, and at the moment it appeared to Mrs. Pollifax a very luxurious and sane way to do such things.

On the other hand, she could remember feeling exactly this way at other times when her tranquil world had collided with Carstairs' rough and dangerous world, and acknowledging this she let her mind run back over past adventures. She was, miraculously, still alive and sound, with dimensions added to her life that brought a chuckle at rare moments, such as when the garden club had shown a prize-winning Colin Ramsey film on Turkey and she had recognized two of the women in baggy pants and veils drawing water from a well. This time it was to be Africa.

She said it aloud "Africa" and at the sound of the word her heart began to beat faster and she realized that she was smiling. Africa, the dark continent. Tarzan. She remembered that when her son Roger was a boy she had taken him to see every Tarzan film that came to the Rivoli theater, and when his tastes had begun to veer toward Rita Hayworth she had gone to see Tarzan alone, enchanted by the animals, the steamy jungles, poisoned arrows and roar of lions . . . Lions, she thought with a gasp. Even if Carstairs sent her to a bustling African city she must find a way to see lions. She would *demand* lions.

How dull her life had been growing lately, she thought, and how exciting to realize that she was going to see Africa. There suddenly seemed a great many things to do. She would have to sort through her entire collection of *National Geographics*, and there was all that material on game conservation in her desk drawer . . .

With a guilty start she realized that it was nine o'clock and the breakfast dishes were still unwashed. Bishop would be coming in a few hours too, and she wondered if he was still partial to chocolate eclairs—she would have to visit Mr. Omelianuk's delicatessen at once. She reached for her coat, tucked her hair under a floppy straw hat, and went out.

It was a brilliant June morning but she walked carefully nevertheless, for the ground beneath her might be covered over with cement, and her eyes shaded by straw, but in Mrs. Pollifax's mind she wore a cork helmet and moved soundlessly through tall grasses, her ears alert for the sound of native drums.

CHAPTER 2

BISHOP ARRIVED PRECISELY AT TWO O'CLOCK, AND ALTHOUGH HE looked harassed he had lost none of his insouciance, which, considering the years he'd spent as Carstairs' assistant, always astonished Mrs. Pollifax. "Why don't you look older?" she protested, taking his coat. "You never do, it's disconcerting."

"Nor do you," he told her gallantly, giving her a kiss on the cheek, "but in my case I *know* I'm older because my pushups are growing lazier and when Carstairs loses his temper at me I sometimes feel an overwhelming urge to cry. Is that for me?" he asked, staring fascinated at the table in the living room set with damask linen, china teapot, flowered Haviland cups and pastries.

"*Especially* for you. Sit down and I'll pour. There are five eclairs."

"I count six."

"One," she told him reproachfully, "is for me. I suppose you're understaffed and overworked because of last year's congressional investigations? Which, I must add, was very shocking indeed. Even *you* need some checks and balances, you know."

"*We* are not and were not being investigated," he said, sitting down and picking up an eclair. "Carstairs asked me to tell you very firmly that his department has remained scrupulous to the letter in all its undertakings." He hesitated and then said dryly, "At least as scrupulous as can be expected when our business is to gather information by nefarious means, hit troublesome people over the head, and indulge in other interesting forms of skulduggery."

Mrs. Pollifax, recalling certain people that she herself had been forced to hit over the head, did not comment: it was a very modest number, of course, but one of which she was sure neither her garden club nor her pastor would approve. She continued pouring tea, noticing that

Bishop was already devouring his second eclair. "You've not had lunch?"

"Clever of you to guess," he said, swallowing. "Carstairs packed me off at eight forty-five with a thousand errands to do, and presently you'll have your share to do too. I don't suppose he told you anything?"

"Not a thing, except it's Africa."

"He wants you to go on safari."

"On safari!" Mrs. Pollifax stared at him in astonishment. *"Safari?"* she repeated incredulously.

Bishop watched her eyes subtly shift focus as if she gazed at something unseen to him and very far away. She looked, in fact, as if she were experiencing a beatific vision, and understanding the processes of her mind, he shook his head. "No, Mrs. Pollifax," he said firmly, "they don't wear cork helmets in Africa any more."

She forgave him this underhanded remark but not without an indignant glance. She said with dignity, "I would be *delighted* to go on safari, cork hat or no. But why? Surely there's more?"

"Naturally. It's a very specific safari starting out next Monday in Kafue National Park in Zambia. That's in Central Africa, and if you're not up on your African countries, it was called Northern Rhodesia before it gained its independence in 1964. You can read all about it because I've brought you lots of pamphlets. It's good safari country, not as well-known, perhaps, as Kenya or Tanzania just to the north, but it's rapidly getting discovered. Less touristy, more relaxed and unspoiled . . . Actually, Kafue Park is one of the larger game parks in the world – half the size of Switzerland – and of course the Victoria Falls are in Zambia too."

"Of course," said Mrs. Pollifax, "and the President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, recently visited Washington."

He looked impressed. "I'd forgotten that. Well, we'd like you to hurry over there, join the safari, get acquainted with your companions and take pictures of them —every one of them—either openly or surreptitiously."

"Is that all?" asked Mrs Pollifax, puzzled.

"Believe me, it's frightfully important," he told her. "We want everyone on safari observed and recorded, and for this we need someone who has always dreamed of a safari, someone utterly charmed by a lioness in the bush, fond of birds and flowers, and of course given to compulsive picture-taking. In fact," he said with a smile, "I'd urge you to carry along a stupefying number of snapshots of your grandchildren, and if you don't have any, rent some. You know how to operate a camera?"

She nodded, and he slit open the mysterious package he'd brought

with him. "Here's a very good normal camera," he said, handing it over to her. "Nothing fancy, you can buy it in any drugstore, easy to operate, small enough to tuck into your pocket. And here," he added, bringing out a jeweler's box, "is a different sort of camera, in case one of the group is camera-shy."

"This is a camera?" said Mrs. Pollifax opening the box and staring at a brooch inside. "It can't be, surely."

"A bit vulgar, isn't it?" he said cheerfully. "But you have to admit it doesn't look like a camera."

"It certainly doesn't." She lifted the lapel pin out of the box and examined it. It had been designed as a miniature clock with a pendulum, its total length about three inches, which included the pendulum from which hung two small gold balls. The face was a sunflower with gold petals surrounding it, and two glittering eyes were set into the center with a curved smile below them.

"Lacks only a cuckoo," pointed out Bishop. "You pull on the chain to take a snapshot. Just a slight tug will do it, and then you touch the hands of the clock to move the film along for the next shot. The lenses are in the eyes. Takes forty snapshots, and then you bring it back to us and we smash it and remove the film."

"Very ingenious," murmured Mrs. Pollifax, and then with a thoughtful glance, "Just who is going to be on this safari, Bishop?"

"It's purest intelligence-gathering," he assured her blithely. "Someone of interest to us may be popping up there. You know how it is, a rumor, a whisper . . . all in the name of the game."

Mrs. Pollifax's smile was gentle. "I've never heard you lean so heavily on clichés before, Bishop. In the name of the *game*?"

"Well, I can't tell you *much* more," he said candidly, "because Carstairs won't allow it. But it won't hurt to point out that there have been a number of assassinations in the past seven months that have never been solved. The most publicized were Malaga in Costa Rica and Messague in France."

She nodded.

"According to the particular netherworld we're in touch with made up of criminals, spies, informants and hangers-on—they were accomplished by one man with the code name of Aristotle. We don't know anything more about him but we've intercepted a message leading us to believe he'll be on this safari Monday, and that's all I can tell you." He brightened. "But I *can* tell you what the computer announced this morning when we fed it a list of possibilities for the job. It seems an old friend of yours is in Zambia. He doesn't work for us any more but you know him very well."

"I do?"

Bishop grinned. "I'd assume that after sharing a cell together in Albania for two weeks you'd know each other pretty damn well."

"Farrell?" gasped Mrs. Pollifax. "John Sebastian Farrell?"

"None other."

"But what's he doing in Zambia, and why doesn't he work for you any longer?"

"We haven't the foggiest idea what he's doing in Zambia," said Bishop, "and he isn't working for us any more because he resigned three years ago. All we know is that his pension—"

"His what?"

"We do pay pensions," Bishop said, amused by the look on her face, "and his payments are being sent to Farrell in care of Barclay's Bank, Lusaka, Zambia. Better make a note of that. Carstairs suggests you look him up when you get to Lusaka and see if he's missing us as much as we've missed him. He should be in the phone book if he's settled down."

"Farrell," said Mrs. Pollifax, her eyes shining. "That dear man. A scoundrel, of course, but I'd trust him with my life, you know. Although not," she added thoughtfully, "with my daughter. No, definitely not with my daughter."

"Mothers always trust me with their daughters," Bishop said wistfully, and then, pulling himself together, unzipped his attaché case. "There's a lot to be done," he said briskly. "I've already visited the Zambia National Tourist Bureau today, as well as the Zambian Embassy. Mercifully, the tourist bureau has room for you in next Monday's safari. Kafue Park is opening only this week—the rainy season's just ended, you see—so luck was with us. As for your visa, it took persuasion, but if you'll let me carry your passport back to New York with me this afternoon they'll issue you one immediately and return your passport to you by special delivery. That leaves your yellow-fever vaccination. Your doctor is being sent the vaccine and you're to see him at four o'clock tomorrow afternoon. You leave Saturday night for London, and Sunday night for Lusaka, and here are your plane tickets," he said, placing them on the table. "Here are also booklets and pamphlets and brochures about Zambia—" He placed these on the growing pile and glanced up at her. "Are you still with me? Am I forgetting something?"

"Clothes," pointed out Mrs. Pollifax.

Bishop understood at once; it was why mothers trusted him. "Go to New York early on Saturday before your plane leaves, if you can't make it sooner. Slacks, a bush jacket, a sweater, good walking shoes . . . Abercrombie's will be just the place for you. And oh yes, here are antimalarial tablets, good God I almost forgot them. Start taking them at

once." He glanced at his watch and sighed. "I hope that's all because damn it I'm already an hour behind schedule and I've got to be running along."

"Oh Bishop, so soon?"

He nodded. "It's one of the deficiencies of my life with Carstairs that I never see anyone for more than half an hour, and always on the run. Beautiful chocolate eclairs," he said fervently. "All five of them." Collecting his attaché case, he arose. "Now I need your passport."

She found it in the desk drawer and gave it to him. "I'll send you a postcard from Zambia," she told him.

"Better not," he said regretfully. "Just take lots of snapshots for us of everyone on that safari, barring no one—and have your reunion with Farrell and see if he's bored yet. He called you the Duchess, didn't he?"

"It seems a century ago," admitted Mrs. Pollifax, following him to the door. "Do you remember how naïve I used to be?"

"No, really?" said Bishop, amused. "Yes . . . Well, I don't find you particularly hardened even now, but there's always hope, isn't there? Don't forget that yellow-fever shot tomorrow and stay out of trouble, you hear?"

"Of course," she told him, and watched him hurry down the hall to the elevator. When he had disappeared she closed the door, walked back into the living room, and remembering how her morning had begun, she nostalgically assumed the karate on-guard stance again. So much had changed, however—even to the slant of the sun through the windows—that as she cut the air with a horizontal slash she tried a small and daring "*Ki-ya*." This proved unsatisfying. Drawing a deeper breath she braced herself and shouted triumphantly, *"KI-YA!"*

CHAPTER 3

On Saturday Mrs. Pollifax left early for New York to spend an afternoon at Abercrombie's before her plane departure. She was already flushed with triumph at finding a new hat for traveling. It was not precisely a cork helmet but it looked so remarkably like one that she no longer felt deprived. It was a bulbous white straw with a single red feather that began in the back and ran up and across the top of the crown and down to the tiny brim in front, where it was held in place by a clip. The narrow line of scarlet relieved the hat's austerity and added a dashing touch to her two-year-old blue-and-white-striped suit.

Nothing had prepared her for Abercrombie's, however. It was true that she had once or twice poked her head in the door out of curiosity, but she had never before entered the store with purpose, or with a safari waiting in the wings. Now, given *carte blanche*, she lost all inhibition, especially after discovering that the five pounds she'd lost during the winter placed her unexpectedly in a pair of size 12 slacks. In only half an hour she dealt with her wardrobe: two pairs of khaki slacks went into her suitcase, a trim bush jacket, a heavy turtleneck sweater, and a long pale-blue cardigan with a sash. Her remaining creativeness she saved for Abercrombie's accessories, which left her in a state of ecstasy. She succumbed immediately to a pair of enormous tinted round sun-goggles which gave her the look of a Martian; she found herself wondering how she could have survived for so long without them. She bought a flashlight and then a pencil flashlight. Regretfully she decided against a set of aluminum dishes that folded one inside of another until they fitted into a small pouch. She bought a dust veil because there was always the chance that she might be caught in a dust storm; she added a silk kerchief with zebras racing across it, and believed that she had concluded her purchases until she saw the umbrella.

"It's rather large," the clerk pointed out, watching her with a fascinated eye.

"Yes, but isn't it beautiful?" she said in an awed voice, admiring its rainbow effect of scarlets, yellows, blues, pinks and oranges.

"I believe the rainy season has ended in Zambia."

"True," she said reflectively, "but then it's really a matter of semantics, don't you think?"

"I beg your pardon?" he said, startled by the *non sequitur*.

"I mean that an umbrella could just as easily be called a parasol, don't you think? If the rainy season's over there'll be sun. A great deal of sun, I should imagine."

"Yes," said the young man, intrigued. "Yes, that's certainly true. Sun and dust."

She nodded. "And I shall have my dust veil and a parasol."

"Yes you will," he said, beginning to follow her line of reasoning.

"And then if one falls in love with something," she confessed, "one is always sorry later one didn't buy it."

"Exactly," he said warmly. "Of course you must have it then."

Mrs. Pollifax agreed, and bought it, and was not even sorry when the airline classified it as a weapon and she had to watch it dropped down baggage chutes all during her trip. It was, she thought, a very minor inconvenience when it was such a glorious umbrella. Or parasol.

And so at ten o'clock that evening Mrs. Pollifax set out on her flight to London, suitably vaccinated and carrying her suitcase full of drip-dries, khaki and other small treasures. Not for her the luxury of magazines: once in flight she efficiently brought out her book on Central Africa animals and read, "The roan antelope is, in general color, a pale reddish brown, slightly darker on the hind quarters, the hair short and coarse," and then she fell asleep. Upon waking she read, "The sable antelope is rich deep brown, the old males jet black," and fell asleep again. At Heathrow airport she napped for a few hours in a day room, and at eight o'clock in the evening she boarded the Zambia Airways plane and resumed her trip to Lusaka.

Here she met with her first disappointment. Since Zambia was a new country, roughly a decade old and developing fast—the Third World, she thought solemnly—she had expected a few exotic companions on her flight, but instead she appeared to be surrounded by British families on holiday with babies and small children. The only bright notes provided were the lovely black stewardesses in their orange minidresses.

Mrs. Pollifax dozed and woke, determined not to miss her first glimpse of Africa. Very early in the morning, at first light, she opened her eyes and looked out over a floor of wrinkled clouds to see a bright-

orange sun slip out of the dusk and trail a line of soft pink behind it. All drowsiness vanished as she sat up in anticipation. Gradually the clouds brightened and dispersed, the sun shed a warm clear light over the sky, and Mrs. Pollifax, looking down from the plane, saw Africa.

Africa at last, and not a dark continent at all, she thought exuberantly, staring at the strange world below. From this height it looked as if the earth's skin had been peeled back and cooked into a dull-orange crust and then lightly sprinkled with green lichen. Oddest of all were the upheavals appearing here and there in the earth. Really, she thought, they looked just like bubbles in a thick stew on the stove.

Soon the view grew softer, and the pale dusty green turned into rich chenille, defined by narrow red-clay roads like seams in a garment stretching to the horizon. Once she leaned forward, certain that she saw a village of huts below, and it thrilled her to think of natives waking to the dawn without realizing that she saw them from the sky. She began to grow excited about landing on this earth spread out below her, she began to consider what lay ahead . . . In her purse she carried vouchers sent her by the tourist bureau in New York, and she recalled that she was to be met at the airport by a tourist guide and whisked off to the hotel ("Transfer from Lusaka International Airport to Hotel Intercontinental: $6.60"), and she would remain in Lusaka for roughly six hours ("1430 departure Hotel Intercontinental to Chunga Safari Village, KT/3"). But before she left for Kafue Park at half-past two this afternoon she had every hope of contacting Farrell, and this gave an added fillip to her arrival.

Ever since leaving New York she had found herself wondering what Farrell might be doing in Zambia, and now she tried once again to fit what she knew of him into the rust-colored terrain below her. She remembered that when she'd first met Farrell he'd been running an art gallery in Mexico City, but he'd also been a bona fide painter himself. He'd mentioned smuggling guns to Castro in the early days of the revolution, and she knew that at one time he'd operated a charter boat out of Acapulco, and somewhere in there he'd also begun to work for Carstairs. Now he was retired.

Zambia was a land-locked country, so there would be no charter boats; its revolution had ended in 1964, so there were no guns to smuggle. What would Farrell have found here? "Perhaps an art gallery," she thought, and as she turned this over in her mind she began to like it very much. He would collect Zambian art, she decided, specializing in wood carvings, thumb-pianos and spears, which he would sell to tourists; but of course he would paint his own pictures, too, and she would buy one. Definitely she would buy one and carry it home and hang it in her apart-

ment. She continued weaving pleasant little fantasies about his new life in Zambia, adding a beautiful wife because he would, she felt, make an excellent husband—retired rakes so often did—and perhaps there was a child by now.

She realized the *No Smoking-Fasten Seatbelts* sign had been blinking at her for some time, and now a voice interrupted her speculations to announce their imminent landing. Mrs. Pollifax tucked away her book, fastened her seatbelt and tried to discipline her excitement. This was not easy, because after two nights spent on planes the effect of her arrival on a new continent was rather like an overdose of adrenalin laced by large amounts of caffeine.

The 707 descended, taxied past a line of Zambia Airways DC-8s and came to a stop before a handsome modern terminal building. Mrs. Pollifax disembarked and immediately learned that African mornings could be cold. Shivering, she moved through Passport Controls, where she filled out a tiresome number of forms in a room hung with signs that read PRACTISE HUMANISM, and HUMANISM MUNTU UZYI BANTUIVYINA ULALEMEKA BACEMBELE. She then walked out into the waiting room to a wall of people waiting behind ropes. One of these people detached himself and moved toward her, a smiling young black man in a blue zip-up jacket tossed over a plaid shirt. "Mrs. Pollifax?"

"Yes," she said in relief.

"I'm Homer Kulumbala. Welcome to Lusaka."

"How do you do," she said, beaming at him.

They waited for her suitcase, and then for her umbrella, which appeared to startle Homer. After one look at it he said sternly, "This could be easily stolen. You must guard it carefully while in the city. It is very beautiful."

"Yes, isn't it?" she agreed happily.

A few minutes later they were speeding toward town in a VW bus emblazoned with the tourist bureau insignia. Mrs. Pollifax's first impressions were of space and newness, and a great deal of bougainvillea, and when they drew up to the hotel—which was also spacious, new and surrounded by bougainvillea—Homer told her that it was he who would be driving her to Chunga camp at half-past two, and that she would see more of the capital later, on the trip out of town. She thanked him and gave her suitcase to the porter, but the umbrella she carried herself.

As soon as Mrs. Pollifax reached her hotel room she did not stop to relax; she paused only long enough to extract her striped flannel pajamas from her suitcase and then she reached for the telephone directory on the shelf under the phone. Sitting down on the bed with the book on

her lap—she was surprised to see by its cover that it encompassed the entire country—she eagerly turned the pages until she found Lusaka.

"A . . . B . . . C . . . D . . . E . . . F," she murmured, and running a finger down the list of F's she ticked off Farmer's Co-operative Society of Zambia Ltd., Farmers Prime Butchery, Farmers Produce Association, Fashion Mart Ltd. . . . the name of Farrell was conspicuously missing.

Impossible, she thought, frowning, and resolutely began again, attributing the oversight to tiredness: Farmer's Cooperative Society of Zambia Ltd., Farmers Prime Butchery . . .

There was no Farrell listed among the F's.

Thoroughly frustrated now, she began thumbing through pages at random, checking out F's in towns with names like Chingold, Kazimuli, Kitwe, Kabwe. There seemed to be very few family names listed, and a vast number of government offices and co-ops. In small towns with only a dozen or so entries she noticed that telephone service was available for only a few hours each day, but none of these listed a Farrell either. Extensive research lay ahead, and she realized that in only six and a half hours she would be leaving for Chunga.

This time she began at the very beginning of the directory, but after an hour's diligent study she had still found no John Sebastian Farrell. Yet Bishop had reported that he was *here*, and that all of the checks sent to him in Lusaka had been picked up and cashed.

Barclay's Bank, she thought abruptly and, reaching for the telephone, dialed the front desk to ask what hours the banks were open. From eight o'clock to twelve, the desk clerk informed her.

It was half-past eight now. "And the afternoon hours?"

There were no afternoon hours.

Mrs. Pollifax thanked him, and with a wistful glance at her pajamas she picked up her purse and went out.

Cairo Road was a bustling main street lined with modern shops. A strip of green divided its double roadway, and there were pleasing, tree-lined cobbled spaces inserted between the buildings, restful to the eye. Women in long bright skirts, blouses and turbans mingled with women in smart frocks and sandals. Almost all of the faces were black, and almost all of the voices she overheard had unexpected and very charming British accents. It was a noisy, cheerful scene, with a great deal of tooting from the small cars, motor scooters, Land Rovers and bicycles that streamed up and down Cairo Road.

Mrs. Pollifax paid her driver and walked into Barclay's Bank to the window marked INQUIRIES—MAIL. The man behind the counter looked forbidding, his black face buttoned into bureaucratic aloofness. She

cleared her throat to gain his attention. "This is where mail is picked up?"

"Yes, madam," he said, regarding her with expressionless eyes. "Your name is—?"

She shook her head. "I'm not looking for mail, I'm looking for a man who receives his mail here. For three years his mail has been directed to him in care of Barclay's Bank, Lusaka. I don't have his address," she explained, "and I've come all the way from America and I find he's not listed in the telephone book."

"This is rather interesting," he said politely.

"His name is John Sebastian Farrell," she told him. "I thought perhaps after three years you might be forwarding his letters to an address?"

His gaze remained aloof, but after a moment he turned and called, "Jacob?"

The beaming young man who appeared was of a different generation; his tie was flaming red and his face eager. Mrs. Pollifax repeated her query to him, and he promptly said, "No address, he still gets his mail here."

"Personally?" asked his superior, who suddenly gave evidence of understanding exactly what Mrs. Pollifax wanted.

"I've never seen him," said Jacob. "A boy picks it up."

"Always?" faltered Mrs. Pollifax.

"I have never seen this man either," said the older clerk. "There has been some curiosity about him, of course. I too have only seen a boy ask for Mr. Farrell's mail. Not often, sometimes not for three months. A different boy each time."

"Oh," said Mrs. Pollifax, her heart sinking. "Oh dear. Are there perhaps I shouldn't ask but are there any letters waiting for him now, so that someone might be picking up his mail soon? I could write a note," she explained.

Now they were both gripped by her problem, touched by her dismay, their eyes sympathetic. "It would be good for you to write a letter to your friend," Jacob said earnestly, "but only two weeks ago Mr. Farrell's mail was collected. I myself gave it out -a small boy again, with the note authorizing him to gather it—"

"I see," said Mrs. Pollifax. "Yes well, I thank you very much, both of you."

"You must write him," the older man said firmly.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, of course."

She walked outside into the sun again, crossed the road to the center

strip and sat down on a bench under a tree. She felt almost inconsolable, and very close to tears, which was probably the result of two nights of spasmodic sleep, but it was also due to a sense of acute loss. It was not just that Farrell was part of her assignment, it had nothing at all to do with her assignment. She was genuinely fond of Farrell and she had anticipated seeing him.

A newspaper lay beside her on the bench and she picked it up and opened it to conceal her tears. She saw that it was this morning's *Times of Zambia*, and out of some vague hope that she might find Farrell listed in it she turned to the back page and prepared to read the entire paper. On this last page, however, she found herself staring at CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS, and at a column marked *Personals* in particular. She read:

GOOD SAMARITAN: befriend suicidal and despairing. Write Box 1–A or telephone . . .

LOST: Mercedes keys left on counter National Commercial Bank Ltd. 10:30 Monday. Finder please return to . . .

Mrs. Pollifax turned thoughtful; she hadn't lost any car keys but she'd lost Farrell; she wasn't suicidal, but at the moment she felt disappointed almost to the point of despair. She glanced at the masthead of the newspaper and made her decision. Taking the paper with her she retraced her steps to the bank and inquired the way to the *Times* office. Directions were given her, and ten minutes later she entered the *Times of Zambia* building, only a few blocks down Cairo Road, and was given a form to fill out.

She wrote her name and her address in the United States, and then:

JOHN SEBASTIAN FARRELL: here for safari, love to see you. Back June 16 Hotel Intercontinental. Duchess.

As she completed this she became aware that a man had begun writing out a similar form across the desk from her, and glancing up she found him staring at her. He was a big man, several inches over six feet tall, with a seamed, deeply tanned face and a thatch of white hair. Meeting her glance he nodded. "Good face."

"I beg pardon?" she said, startled.

"Good face," he repeated in a voice that marked him as American. "Look old enough to not mind my saying so."

"Old enough, yes," she said, smiling at him.

"Lost my wallet," he explained with a huge gesture encompassing the desk, his pencil and the office.

"I've lost a friend," she said, and carried her message to the young man at the counter. "How soon can you put this in your newspaper?" she asked him.

The young man accepted her copy and annoyingly read it back to her in a loud, clear voice. " *'John Sebastian Farrell: here for safari, love to see you. Back June 16 Hotel Intercontinental. Duchess.'* " With a glance at his watch he assured her that it would be in tomorrow morning's paper without fail, and that it would cost her one *kwacha* and twenty *ngwee.*

"Roughly two dollars American," put in the huge American, waiting beside her, and peering into her change purse he pointed to one of the larger silver coins. "There's your *kwacha*, the little one's the twenty *ngwee.*"

"Yes—thank you," she stammered, gave the coins to the man and hurried toward the door. Behind her she heard the American say, "Morning. Cyrus Reed's my name. Lost a wallet."

Out on the street she found a taxi discharging a passenger at the building next door and firmly captured it. Once back in her hotel room again, she climbed into her pajamas and resolved to put all thoughts of Farrell aside for the moment. She had done all that she could; if he was still in Zambia he'd see the advertisement, and the rest would be up to him. In the meantime, she thought, animals and Aristotle lay ahead of her. Smiling, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER 4

HER ALARM AWOKE MRS. POLLIFAX AT ONE, AND SHE JUMPED OUT of bed and eagerly approached her suitcase. She opened it lovingly and removed the new bush jacket and the new slacks, reached for a drip-dry blue turtleneck blouse and brought out her comfortable walking shoes. There was a small delay while she fumbled with price tags, but once she was in her safari clothes the effect was dazzling: the old Emily Pollifax, vice-president of the Save-Our-Environment Committee and secretary of the New Brunswick Garden Club had vanished along with the straw hat she'd packed away in her suitcase. She looked—swashbuckling, she thought, admiring herself in the mirror, yes, definitely swashbuckling. Tarzan, she felt, would have approved.

There was a further delay while she tried on the khaki hat, the sun-goggles, the dust veil, and unfurled her parasol, but eventually she was packed and ready to leave. She descended in the elevator, paid her bill at the desk, left her bag with the porter at the front door and, still carrying her umbrella, headed for the Coffee Hut for lunch before her departure for Chunga. She was hesitating at the door when a man's voice behind her said, "Ha found you again. Lunching now?"

Mrs. Pollifax turned and found herself staring into a kelly-green shirt. Lifting her gaze she identified its owner as Cyrus Reed, last seen at the *Times of Zambia*. "As a matter of fact, yes."

"Good. Have it with me," he said, and taking a firm grip on her elbow he piloted her into the patio and seated her efficiently at an umbrella-shaded table. "Don't give you a chance to refuse," he said, taking the chair opposite her.

"No, you didn't."

"Don't often ask women to lunch," he said gruffly. "To dinner either, for that matter. Nuisance, that sort of thing. You aren't, I hope, a real

Duchess? Couldn't help overhearing your classified advertisement in the news office."

"He did read it in a loud voice," she admitted. "Actually I'm Emily Pollifax. Duchess was a a sort of nickname."

He extended an arm across the flowers and they gravely shook hands. He was certainly a large man; big was the only word for him, she decided, looking at him, but it seemed a matter of frame and muscle rather than fat. He moved and spoke slowly, as if stricken by lethargy, but he had whisked her to a table in seconds, and his smile, drowsy as it was, was singularly warm and responsive and his eyes shrewd. There was something very oriental about his eyes, she thought; it was because they were set into his face on the same plane as his brows, like almonds pressing into a snowman's face. Those Chinese lids increased his sleepy look and gave him the appearance of a large and slightly rumpled mandarin.

He said now, observantly, "Eyes had a faraway look when you explained the nickname. Good friend, this Farrell?"

"A very good friend, yes."

"Only kind to have," he said, nodding. "Imaginative idea, advertising. Cyrus Reed's my name, by the way. Lawyer, Connecticut. Care for a drink?"

Mrs. Pollifax smiled at the hovering waiter but shook her head. "I've not a great deal of time," she explained. "I'm being called for at half-past two."

"Then we'll order. I can recommend the chicken because I've had it every day since my arrival. Tirelessly, one might say."

Mr. Reed, it seemed, had been in Lusaka for four days. "My daughter," he explained, "is exhausting. Insisted on our stopping in Rome on the way here, and now she's gone off to Livingstone to see Victoria Falls while I catch my breath. Insisted on renting a car for the trip, said she'd see more of the country."

"I expect she will," said Mrs. Pollifax cheerfully.

"Already late returning. Due back three hours ago. What brings you here?"

"I'm leaving on safari this afternoon," she told him.

His sleepy gaze sharpened. "This afternoon? Not by any chance the five-day Kafue Park safari starting officially tomorrow morning?"

She looked at him in astonishment. "As a matter of fact, yes. You don't mean—?"

He nodded. "Exactly. Arrival at Chunga camp in late afternoon, with game-viewing on the river tomorrow morning, followed by Kafwala camp in the afternoon?"

"Yes, with pickup at two-thirty here by Homer?"

He shook his head. "Sorry about that. We're driving. Lisa's idea." He looked at her and added frankly, "Damn sorry about that, actually, but if I'll see you again the fates are smiling. You're—uh what's the word they use these days, unattached?"

"A widow."

"Ought to say I'm sorry but can't. I like you."

She looked at him and began to laugh. "I really like your directness but I'm not accustomed, you know, to such—such "

"Unabashed admiration? Can't think why not. You look alive," he said firmly. "Can't stand dull people."

"I'm very dull," Mrs. Pollifax told him sincerely. "I do volunteer work not very efficiently –and raise geraniums and really that is, in *general*," she added conscientiously, "live a very quiet life."

"Doesn't mean a thing," he said. "You look interested, a sense of wonder lingers. True?"

"I feel like a witness being cross-examined on the stand."

He nodded. "Bad habit of mine, the trouble with being a lawyer. My two children call it a deficiency or rather, when they're pleased with me they say I'm direct, when they're angry I'm blunt."

"You have two children, then?"

He nodded. "Boy's thirty, the girl that's Lisa twenty-six. Raised them myself since their mother died, which happened when Lisa was three years old, and then said hands off, at least until two years ago. You've children?"

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "Also a boy and a girl, both of them grown up and parents now. But what happened two years ago?"

"Had to rescue Lisa," he said, leaning back for the waiter to deposit dishes in front of them. "You can't imagine from what squalor," he added, "which wouldn't have mattered a tinker's damn if she was happy. Found her living in the East Village in New York doing social work, weight down to ninety-six pounds and crying her heart out over a chap she'd been in love with." He snorted indignantly. "Loved him, she said, because he cared. Trouble was the chap seems to have cared indiscriminately about women mainly, I gather—and led her a merry chase. Considering Lisa graduated *magna cum laude* from Radcliffe it seemed very unintelligent of her."

"Emotions have nothing to do with intellect," pointed out Mrs. Pollifax.

"You understand that," he said, nodding. "Lisa didn't."

"What's happened to her since then?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"You'll see her," he reminded her. "Cool, brisk, businesslike, that's

Lisa. Liked her better when she tumbled for every cause that came along. Warm-hearted, ardent child."

"Then of course she still is," put in Mrs. Pollifax.

"Somewhere, yes, but in the last two years she's grown a shell three feet thick. Thought the trip might do her good. Not healthy for either of us, living together. Exhausting."

Mrs. Pollifax put down her fork and smiled at him. "Is there anything that doesn't exhaust you?"

He directed a sleepy glance at her and smiled. "As a matter of fact a few things . . . good food, good talk, collecting rare books . . . still play a decent game of tennis and I've been known to rouse myself at dawn for bird-watching."

"That's hard to imagine. Are you," she asked sternly, "ecology-minded?"

"Passionately," he said with a straight face.

Mrs. Pollifax laughed and decided at that moment that if she had been deprived of Farrell's company during her few hours in Lusaka, then Cyrus Reed made a rather fair replacement. She also found herself hoping that Mr. Reed's lethargy was genuine, his daughter bona fide, and that he had not acquired a nasty habit of assassinating people in his spare time.

"Dessert?" suggested Mr. Reed, offering her the menu.

She glanced at her watch and shook her head. "I can only thank you for a delicious lunch," she told him, picking up her umbrella, "and see you next at Chunga."

They said goodbye and she removed herself to the lobby, where she chose a chair in sight of the front door. There she sat, gazing with interest at a party of dark men in turbans. A porter walked past her ringing a bicycle bell and carrying a chalkboard on which were scrawled the words "Mr. Kaacha wanted at desk," and then suddenly Homer Kulumbala appeared before her, smiling.

"Good afternoon, you are ready for Chunga?" he asked.

"Ready and waiting," she told him.

"Your luggage?"

She pointed to her suitcase next the door and he picked it up and led her out to the hotel drive. The same VW bus was parked among the bougainvillea, and again she chose the front seat next to the driver. Homer went off to round up other members of the safari and presently returned escorting a narrow man in a pair of slacks and a bush jacket. "Oh dear, we're twins," thought Mrs. Pollifax ruefully, glancing from his bush jacket and slacks to her own, and wondered if everyone on safari would wear identical khaki clothes. "Hello," she said as he reached the bus.

He was a prim-looking little man, perhaps forty-five or fifty, his one notable feature a reddish-brown goatee. He seemed an odd candidate for a safari: he looked fastidious and a trifle pinched about the nostrils, as if the world had a slightly rancid odor to him. At sight of Mrs. Pollifax he looked even more disapproving, or perhaps he resented her occupying the front seat. He stepped carefully into the rear and in faintly accented English called to Homer to be careful with his two suitcases. Only then –and after wiping the seat with his handkerchief did he turn to Mrs. Pollifax and say peevishly, "They throw them, have you noticed?"

"No," said Mrs. Pollifax, and introduced herself.

"Oh. Yes. Well." He extended a thin dry hand and shook hers. "Kleiber here. Willem Kleiber." He did not exactly wipe his hand after touching hers but she had the impression that he wanted to, and that the gesture was aborted only because he thought better of it.

"German?" she asked.

"No, no, Dutch," he said firmly.

If Mrs. Pollifax had feared that all bush outfits might look alike, this idea was quickly dispelled now as Homer escorted a third member of the safari to the bus. The woman walking beside him made Mrs. Pollifax feel suddenly dowdy and not at all swashbuckling. In her forties, she wore her long platinum hair tied in the back with a scarlet silk kerchief. Her bush jacket and slacks were cut out of pale-beige gabardine that very nearly matched the color of her hair, and they had been tailored to outline every curve of her figure. Diamonds glittered on several fingers, and a stunning turquoise was pinned to her black turtleneck shirt. Everything about her was striking, from her outfit to her cool sapphire eyes, the clear-cut features, pale-pink mouth and subtly tanned face.

". . . very nearly didn't stop, you know, and I was afraid I'd not be here in time, and then—oh, two already here, isn't this super," she said, stopping by the bus and smiling at Mr. Kleiber. "I think we'd better introduce ourselves, don't you?" Her voice was caressing, with a somewhat affected British accent, so that the word *better* emerged as *baytor*, spoken through the nose with a not unattractive nasal quality. "I'm Mrs. Lovercraft," she said. "*Amy* Lovecraft."

At this moment a tall, good-looking young man walked out of the hotel, shouted to Homer and then strode toward the bus calling, "I say, is this the transportation to Chunga camp for the KT/3 safari?"

"What a lovely man," murmured Mrs. Lovecraft appreciatively.

"Yes, yes," said Homer. "You are—?"

"John Steeves." He was dressed very casually in a heavy turtleneck sweater and shabby twill slacks; he looked, thought Mrs. Pollifax, like a

man who would know that African mornings were cold. He looked seasoned. His voice marked him as an Englishman, the patina on his boots marked him as a hiker. His face was long and intense, with a thick brown mustache and interesting dark eyes.

Homer's face lighted up at the name. "Of course—yes, I was inquiring for you. Have you luggage?"

"A duffelbag, but Tom's bringing it. He's one of the party, too, we met in the Coffee Hut. Tom Henry." He turned and gestured vaguely toward the hotel entrance. "There he is," he said.

Mrs. Pollifax turned and saw a solid-looking young man walk out of the hotel carrying a suitcase and a duffelbag, followed by a barefooted black boy carrying a second suitcase. Tom Henry looked cheerful and uncomplicated, with sandy hair and a pair of level, candid gray eyes. No nonsense about him, thought Mrs. Pollifax, liking him at once; relaxed, stable and efficient. The boy walking beside him suddenly looked up at him and smiled. It was, thought Mrs. Pollifax, the most adoring glance that she'd ever seen a child give an adult, and she realized that the two belonged together.

"Henry?" said Homer, puzzled, and then, "Ah, this is *Doctor* Henry? Dr. Henry from the mission hospital?"

"And Chanda," the young man said firmly. "Chanda Henry."

The three men and the boy moved to the back of the bus to stow away their luggage, and Mrs. Lovecraft climbed in beside Mr. Kleiber, saying, "Isn't this fun?"

Glancing toward the hotel Mrs. Pollifax saw Cyrus Reed walk out, looking vaguely concerned. He had exchanged his seersucker suit for a pair of new bluejeans that made his legs look very long indeed, and over this he wore a shirt and a shabby jacket. After noticing the bus he came toward it, and looking extraordinarily pleased at seeing her in it, he leaned over and spoke to her through the window.

"She's five hours late now," he said. "Difficulties mount."

At that moment a small red Fiat raced into the drive of the hotel and came to a sudden stop, its tires protesting shrilly. A voice called, "Dad!" and a young woman as petite as Reed was enormous jumped out of the car and waved. "I'm here, Judge!"

"That," said Cyrus Reed resignedly, "is Lisa."

"Judge?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"Retired."

She turned to look again at the young woman who was now opening the door of the car. She was slim and long-legged and difficult to overlook because her hair was bright auburn, the color of a new penny, and

her face was round and pixie-like, with a dimple in the chin. Mrs. Pollifax said, "She doesn't look at all cold and businesslike."

"She doesn't, does she," said Reed. He looked surprised. "Something's different. Like you to meet her. I'll bring her back."

Mrs. Pollifax watched as Lisa spoke to someone inside the car, and then from its confining interior crept a woman with a baby in a sling over her shoulders, followed by a small black man in a business suit and spectacles, three grinning barefooted boys, a bent old man carrying a crutch, and at last a young man in purple slacks and pink shirt. It was rather like that old circus act, thought Mrs. Pollifax, where dozens of people kept emerging from a tiny car, and she wondered how on earth they had all fitted inside. Lisa shook hands with each of them and then allowed herself to be led off to the minibus by her father.

". . . a flat tire," she was saying, "but Kanyama helped me change it and Mbulo was carrying firewood when I picked him up, so we had a jolly fire by the side of the road and cooked a breakfast. Really neat—and you should have seen the Falls!"

"I suppose you had to give rides to everyone?"

"Well, but wasn't it providential that I did? Otherwise I'd still be down near Penga somewhere with a flat tire. It's not at all like the States, Dad. Nobody asked for a ride, but how could I drive by them when I had a car and they didn't? Hello," she said, smiling warmly at Mrs. Pollifax. "Hello," she added, nodding to Mrs. Lovecraft and Mr. Kleiber.

"Well, you've not made it with much time to spare," said her father, sounding like fathers everywhere.

"Yes, but I made it, didn't I?" said Lisa, grinning. "And who's holding us up now? See you all later," she called over her shoulder, and began propelling her father toward the hotel.

On the way to the entrance they passed Homer carrying luggage for another guest. The Reeds stopped to speak to him, leaving the newest member of the party waiting patiently, a faint smile on his lips. He was a man of average height, perhaps fifty, carrying an attaché case and a battered trench coat over his arm. He was still dressed for traveling, Mrs. Pollifax noted, in a light suit that must once have been well-cut but was wrinkled now. He wore his hair rather long; it was jet black, with streaks of pure white.

The group abruptly dissolved and Homer came toward them smiling. "We now have Mr. McIntosh," he said, gesturing at the man beside him. "We go. Gentlemen, if you will be so kind as to get in the bus now?"

The two men and the boy Chanda climbed into the seat in the far rear, next the luggage. Mr. McIntosh crawled past Mrs. Lovecraft to sit in the space between her and Mr. Kleiber. Homer closed and locked the doors

and a moment later they were off, driving on the left side of the road like the British.

They passed the National Assembly building with its roof sheathed in copper and gleaming in the sun. They passed neat rows of government housing and then a shantytown with thatched-roof huts, and finally, leaving the city behind, a satellite station that had been built by the Japanese, Homer told them. As the traffic thinned they sped past fields of cotton, sunflowers and maize, and the pedestrians along the side of the road increased: women walking with loads of firewood balanced carefully on their heads, a few men wheeling bicycles. Then these, too, vanished and they settled down to the long road ahead, moving steadily toward the Mungwa mountain range. The sun began to look surprisingly low on the horizon to Mrs. Pollifax, and when she commented on this she was startled to learn that in Zambia the sun set at six o'clock. She began to understand some of the urgency behind Homer's driving; certainly he drove like a man pursued by *something*, and now it was heartening to realize the something was darkness, because she had no desire to be caught among wild animals in the dark either. The excessive speed rendered conversation almost impossible, however; everything rattled and it was necessary to cling to one's seat.

An hour later Mrs. Pollifax was still clinging to her seat when Homer placed his foot on the brake and nearly sent her through the windshield. Up ahead she saw a roadblock, a gaily striped red-and-white pole extending from one side of the road to the other.

From the rear Mr. Kleiber called, "And what is this?"

"The bridge," said Homer. "All our bridges are guarded by the police."

"Good heavens why?" asked Mrs. Pollifax, turning to look at him in surprise.

"Rhodesian spies," he said with a shrug. "They try to bomb our bridges. We have three in Zambia, all of them over the Kafue River." He pronounced it *Ka-fooey*.

"Rhodesian *spies*?" repeated Mrs. Pollifax.

"Yes, spies. They are everywhere." With a jerk of his head to the left he added, "The police live over there."

Mrs. Pollifax glanced to the left and saw a cluster of corrugated tin houses down near the river, shaded by a circle of acacia trees. She started to speak but Homer's attention had turned to the guard who walked toward them, looking very official with a rifle strapped across his back. He wore a felt cavalry hat, blue khaki shorts and tunic, and around his legs a wrapping of heavy cloth from ankle to knee that could only be puttees, decided Mrs. Pollifax, remembering Kipling. He peered

into the car and then shook hands with Homer and began talking in an incomprehensible language that Homer seemed to understand. At last the guard saluted, the bus was put into gear and they moved across the modest bridge over the river. "What language was it that you spoke back there?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"Nyanga," said Homer. "I speak Tonga, he speaks Luvale but we both know Nyanga. All the government people know Nyanga."

"Those spies you mentioned," began Mrs. Pollifax, and then found it even more difficult to be heard as they turned off the paved highway onto a dirt road marked by a sign that read CHUNGA CAMP. "Those spies," she shouted above the rattles and bumps, hanging onto her seat with both hands to keep from hitting the roof of the bus.

"What?" shouted Homer.

"Spies," she shrieked. Just as she decided that the road had been cut out of a pitted lava bed it changed to brown dust beaten hard into corrugated stripes that placed her more firmly in her seat but vibrated her spine like a massage.

Homer neatly steered the bus around a hole and shouted back, "They spy on freedom fighters. In the Southern Province they used to cross the border from Rhodesia and kidnap people, set land mines and kill. There is not so much there now, but still they sneak in. A month ago they set a bomb in Lusaka, at private home, and killed Mr. Chitepo, Rhodesian black nationalist in the African National Congress."

"Who did?" shouted Mrs. Polifax. "Who would do such a thing?"

Homer shrugged. "Mercenaries. Rhodesian police agents. Spies."

Mrs. Pollifax rested her voice while she attached this diverting piece of news to certain facts casually mentioned in the pamphlets that Bishop had deposited with her last week. She remembered that until recently Zambia had been a lonely bastion of black independence in the center of Africa, bounded on the east by Portuguese-ruled Mozambique, on the west by Portuguese-ruled Angola, with Rhodesia flanking its southern border, backed up by South Africa below it. That had been Zambia's situation when it finally threw off the last shackles of white rule in 1964.

At the time of its independence, however, Zambia had found itself still bound to Rhodesia by roads, electric power, rail routes and economic ties. A man who loathed apartheid and who dedicated himself to working against it, President Kaunda had set out at once to loosen those ties, enlisting the help of the Chinese to build a railway to the north, and the Italians to build a new dam. The price of rejecting any dependence on Rhodesia had been severe: during one crisis the country had been forced to export its copper by trucks over a road that came to be called the "Hell Run." Zambia had survived, however, and she supposed that it

was proof of President Kaunda's genius that it had not only survived economically but had remained involved in and supportive of the liberation movements in her neighboring countries. Those were the words the pamphlet had used: *involved* and *supportive*. *Embroiled* sounded more appropriate, she thought dryly; certainly nothing had been said about spies, land mines and kidnapings.

Now of course, both Mozambique and Angola had won their independence after years of guerilla warfare and bloodshed, and Rhodesia and South Africa stood alone as rigid defenders of white supremacy. But she had forgotten—it came back to her now—that sometime during the worst of the infighting Rhodesia had angrily closed her borders to Zambia, precipitating even more strains on the Zambian economy. A pity, she thought, that taking a stand on moral issues had to prove so lonely these days, but apparently the closure was only a formal one if spies streamed back and forth. She remembered that the phrase "freedom fighters" had been mentioned, too, in one of those pocket histories.

"Freedom fighters," she shouted at Homer's profile. "Who are they?"

"Liberation leaders," he called back at her. "Refugees. They escape to Zambia with a price on their heads, or prison sentences. They stay, they train, they go back. Quietly, you understand?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Pollifax, nodding. "I just didn't realize it was still—uh—continuing."

He nodded vigorously. "But the leaders begin to talk now. South Africa grows very worried, she fears a race war in Africa and pushes Rhodesia to talk, loosen up. We have a saying: '*Ukupangile nsofu kano uli ne fumo*. Before you can talk of killing an elephant you must first be equipped with a spear.' " He grinned and slowed the minibus. "And speaking of elephants, there is your first elephant, everyone. You wish pictures?"

Exclamations rose from the rear, but Mrs. Pollifax could only gasp and stare. Her first elephant stood scarcely fifteen feet away, grazing contentedly on the leaves at the top of a tree, his huge gray frame bleached by dust, his flaplike ears cocked as if he knew very well they were there. Slowly he turned his ponderous head and looked at the minibus with beady interested eyes. Mrs. Pollifax was certain that he stared directly at her. She gave him a delighted, grateful smile before she lifted her camera and snapped his picture.

They drove on, reaching another road barrier, this one manned by an amiable young park guard. After slowing down to allow a family of baboons to cross the road, Mrs. Pollifax glimpsed the thatched tops of buildings ahead. They entered a clearing, passed a gas pump, a cluster

of rondevaals with thatched roofs, and coasted to a stop near a sloping riverbank.

"Is this Chunga camp?" called Mrs. Lovecraft.

Homer shook his head. "This is noncatering section, for weekend campers only. We wait now for the boat. There should be a boat," he said, frowning, and climbed out and stared across the river at what looked to be an island.

Mrs. Pollifax opened the door beside her and jumped down to stretch her legs. The others stirred too, and climbed out, smiling at each other a little uncertainly. Mrs. Lovecraft strolled over to join Homer, and after a moment Mr. McIntosh and Mr. Kleiber followed her. The sun had disappeared behind a cloud, draining all color from the landscape, and Mrs. Pollifax felt suddenly very small under the huge silvery sky as she waited for a mysterious boat that showed no signs of appearing on that vast flat expanse of silky gray water.

"There," said Homer suddenly, pointing. "The boat."

A small speck had appeared on the gray water, looking almost spectral as it rounded the point. It veered, grew larger, became an object totally unlike a boat, and then as it moved toward them, one man at the stern, she began to hear the sound of its motor and she realized it was a pontoon boat, nearly flat and propelled by an outboard motor.

"Good, let's help with all this luggage," Dr. Henry said, and walked around to the back of the bus and began handing suitcases to Chanda. There was a whispered discussion between them and then he said, "No, no, you give it to her." Holding up Mrs. Pollifax's gay umbrella he said, "Chanda tells me this is yours?"

"Yes, but how on earth did he know?" she asked in surprise.

Dr. Henry laughed. "I couldn't possibly tell you, but he always knows these things. He says he looked inside of you and saw colors to match. *Mukolamfula* was the word which, if the little Bemba I've learned is right, means rainbow."

"I'm very touched," she said, smiling at Chanda.

The boy handed her the umbrella, grinned, ducked his head shyly and went back for another suitcase. Behind her the boat had just landed, the slant of its bow dovetailing perfectly with the slant of the riverbank. Homer said, "The boat will come back for the luggage, it is very safe here. You will get in now, please?"

They distributed themselves on packing cases; the boat was pushed away from the shore, the motor sputtered, they turned and began the trip toward the distant shore, any conversation rendered frivolous by the awesome silence of the river. The only sounds were of the water streaming past the bow, leaving a frothy wake behind them, and the murmur of

Homer's voice as he spoke quietly to the boy at the wheel. The air was cool, full of fragrances, and as they chugged their way toward the opposite bank the smell of a wood fire became distinct.

Suddenly the sun reappeared, very low on the horizon now, and as the boat rounded the point Mrs. Pollifax had her first view of Chunga camp. She saw another sloping riverbank cut out of the trees, with a narrow wharf jutting into the water. Smoke from a campfire drifted lazily across the clearing, threading its way through the palms. Off to the left there was a long white building with a thatched roof, and behind this, spaced at intervals up and down a gently sloping hill, stood narrow cabins built of reed and thatch.

The sound of the boat had brought a handful of people down to the landing, all of their faces black. One in particular stood out from the others, a broad-shouldered young man in forest-green tunic and shorts. His smile as the boat reached the weathered gray dock was as broad as his shoulders, a brilliant slash of white that met and warmed two laughing eyes.

"Welcome to Chunga," he said as the boat slid up to the wharf. "I'm Julian, your safari manager. If you will come in and register—?"

Mrs. Pollifax was the first to enter the small office near the landing. Julian handed her registration forms and a pen and she brought out her passport and copied down its numbers. Over her shoulder Julian called instructions to the boy who had brought them in the boat, and a moment later she heard the sound of the motor on the water. "Besides the luggage," he explained to her, "there are two more guests coming soon from Lusaka."

"Yes, I know," she said, "I met them."

His huge white smile blossomed again. "Then you have already two friends, good. Moses takes you up now, you'll be in Leopard cabin."

Moses wore dusty sneakers and bright-blue slacks. She turned and followed him up a gravel path. The reborn sun was meeting the horizon now, its light no longer clear gold but a hot amber that rusted the soil a deeper red. Along the path leaves crackled underfoot like dry parchment, and Mrs. Pollifax shivered in the sudden coolness. When they reached the cabin marked Leopard, Moses carried her suitcase up four wooden stairs and placed it beside the door, and then he stood and explained that there was a shower and pointed vaguely off into the distance. Mrs. Pollifax, her mind now on sweaters, blankets and hot coffee, shook her head, thanked him and scurried up the steps into the cabin. As she turned to close the wooden door behind her the sun slipped over the horizon with finality. Homer had been absolutely correct: it was just six o'clock.

CHAPTER 5

It was dim inside the cabin. Two small screened windows were heavily shaded by the thatch roof but an electric-light bulb dangled over the night table and Mrs. Pollifax snapped it on. The pair of narrow beds looked oddly bridelike: they were sealed inside of white mosquito netting that flowed like bridal veils from the ceiling and were tucked firmly under each mattress, rendering each bed nearly inaccessible. Frustrated, she deposited her suitcase on the floor until she saw a luggage rack behind the door and placed it there instead, and then, looking around her she said aloud, "Well I'm *here*."

And so, presumably, was Aristotle, she reminded herself.

It was incredibly, starkly quiet . . . Something fell to the ground outside her cabin; it sounded like fruit dropping from a tree. A faint breeze rustled the reed walls and then subsided, and she could hear the distant hum of a generator. Presently voices inserted themselves into this bottomless quiet; she heard a girl laugh, a man reply and recognized Cyrus Reed's voice: so he and Lisa had arrived. She opened her suitcase and quickly changed into a heavy sweater, combed her hair, checked the film in her camera and picked up her jacket. When she opened the door a lizard slid across the step and vanished under the cabin. Carrying her flashlight she walked down the path toward the water, hesitated, and then passed through an empty, brightly lighted bar into the dining hall. Just beyond its low wall a campfire was burning in the cleared area overlooking the river. A dozen chairs encircled it, and one of them was occupied by John Steeves.

Seeing her he rose and gave her a quick, rather shy smile that lighted up his serious face. "I don't believe I know your name," he said, holding out a hand. "I'm John Steeves."

"Emily Pollifax," she told him, shaking hands with him. "Do sit

down. I love this fire. I'm going to sit as close as I dare because actually I'm freezing."

"I know," he said, nodding. "It's really early spring here, and a rather late rainy season too, they tell me, which is why the roads haven't been graded yet. As perhaps you noticed," he said with a grin.

She realized that he was much older than she'd thought at first. Everything about him was boyish—his relatively unlined face, his slouch, his vitality—except for his eyes: there was something haunted about his eyes, as if they'd seen too much. They were what her son Roger would call the eyes of an old soul, so that she now added quite a few years to her original impression and guessed him to be in his middle thirties.

"Looking forward to the safari?" he asked, and Mrs. Pollifax realized that she'd been staring at him.

"Oh yes indeed," she told him warmly. "And you?"

He nodded. "Bit of a rest for me. Too much traveling spoils one for resorts and the really plush places."

"You travel a great deal, then?"

He nodded, extended one lean leg and poked at the fire with his shabby boot. "Write travel books," he said.

"Steeves," she mused. "I'm afraid—"

"I know," he said with that sudden blaze of a smile that so transformed him. "People never remember authors' names."

"Tell me the titles of your books, then."

"Mmmmm . . . *Lost in the Himalayas, At Home in the Andes*, followed by *Over the Chinese Border* and *One Hundred Nights in a Mongolian Yurt*."

"But of course," she exclaimed. "I read *Over the Chinese Border* and enjoyed it tremendously. You disguise yourself and live among the natives."

He grinned. "You might say disguise is the main ingredient of my success, yes. A bit of the actor in me, you know, I love fooling around with makeup. Actually I began as an actor, but it's much more fun applying it all to dangerous situations."

"You like danger?" she asked curiously.

"It certainly beats the humdrum routine of ordinary living," he said ruefully.

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Pollifax, smiling faintly. "The exhilaration. The things one learns about oneself. The total immersion in the moment."

He looked at her in surprise, as if he'd not expected this from her. "You seem to have experienced something of it—" His glance moved beyond Mrs. Pollifax and he stopped speaking, a curious expression on

his face. She turned and saw Lisa Reed walking toward them, her father just emerging from the dining hall behind her.

Steeves rose to his feet, looking impressed. "I say good evening. You weren't on the bus with us, are you in the safari group too?"

Lisa had changed into bluejeans and a denim shirt and in them she looked younger, more vulnerable, her fashionable leanness replaced by a fragile quality. It occurred to Mrs. Pollifax that she was blushing; certainly her gamine face had turned a darker color but her voice when she spoke was impersonal. "Yes, we came by car from Lusaka. I'm Lisa Reed."

"And Cyrus Reed, parent," added her father. Sinking into the chair beside Mrs. Pollifax he smiled at her and said, "Good to see you again."

Steeves looked pleased. "Americans, are you? I do wish you'd sit down over here—I've not met an American in years. Perhaps you can explain to me what's been happening in your country."

"Lisa can if anyone can," said Reed. "A biased account, naturally."

Steeves flashed his quick, radiant smile. "But all accounts are biased, surely? You had something called a watershed affair?"

That won a smile from Lisa. "No, no," she said, sitting down next to him, and began speaking with quick gestures, her face very serious, her slender hands cutting the air with incisive slashes.

Her father turned to Mrs. Pollifax. "Thought you'd like to know, by the way, that someone was asking for you at the hotel when I checked out."

"Asking for me?" gasped Mrs. Pollifax. "Was he tall, with dark hair and blue eyes and—"

Reed shook his head. "Zambian. Short black chap. Dressed in a kind of—well," he said, looking pained, "it had hibiscus all over it. Or bougainvillea. That sort of shirt, with black trousers and sneakers."

Puzzled, Mrs. Pollifax said, "And you're quite sure he was asking for *me*?"

"Clearly," nodded Reed. "Couldn't help but overhear. Asked for your room number, the clerk said you'd already checked out, he left."

"How very odd," said Mrs. Pollifax, frowning. "There's that advertisement, of course, but it won't be published in the *Times of Zambia* until tomorrow morning."

Her companion nodded. "Unless the typesetter knows someone who knows someone who knows your friend. Or perhaps the travel bureau sent a chap along to make sure you'd gotten off on time." With a gesture toward the other two he said, "Damn glad to see there's someone young and male for Lisa."

Mrs. Pollifax wrenched her thoughts away from the mysterious man

at the hotel. "I thought," she said, "that your daughter blushed when she saw him."

His brows lifted. "Thought so, did you?" He turned and gazed at Lisa with interest. "Amazing. I missed that."

"You were standing behind her."

"So I was. Seems an engaging fellow, Steeves."

John Steeves was certainly being very attentive, thought Mrs. Pollifax, glancing at the two across the campfire: those haunted eyes of his were fixed intently on Lisa's face as he listened, his quick smile occasionally transforming their sadness. It was a rare person who listened like that, reflected Mrs. Pollifax, and thought it a quality difficult for any woman to resist.

"And you?" asked Reed, directing his quizzical glance at her. "Always travel alone?"

"Oh yes," she said simply. "At least—"

"At least you start off alone," he said with his slow smile, "and then collect people like a Pied Piper? Ah, here comes whatsisname. Dour fellow you rode out with."

"Mr. Kleiber," she reminded him. "Willem Kleiber."

Mr. Kleiber approached the fire hesitantly, sat down two chairs removed from Cyrus Reed and said distastefully, "There is a *complete* absence of running water here. Exactly how does one wash?"

"The word *safari*," said Reed in an offhand voice, "means camping, you know."

Lisa had turned at the sound of his voice. "There are shower pipes behind those reed fences, you know. Hot water too."

Mr. Kleiber's nose looked, if anything, even more pinched; he had the most active nostrils of anyone she'd met, thought Mrs. Pollifax. "Anyone can walk in," he said coldly. "Anyone. There's no door, there's no roof."

In a rather amused voice Steeves said, "I really don't think anyone would want to, you know. Try singing loudly while you're under the tap."

"That's just what *I* did," said Amy Lovecraft, strolling into the circle and joining them. She was looking very elegant in snug black pants, a cashmere sweater and a short suede jacket. She chose the seat on the other side of John Steeves and sat down, placed a hand on his arm and smiled into his face. "I do hope we're on a first-name basis now so that I can call you John."

"Please do," he said politely. "Have you met Lisa Reed?"

"No, duck," she said and, leaning forward, gave Lisa a much less enthusiastic smile. "I've not met that lovely huge man over there, either."

"We're both Reeds," Lisa said shortly. "I'm Lisa and he's my father Cyrus, and that's Mrs. Pollifax next him."

"Delighted, Cyrus," said Mrs. Lovecraft, giving him a warm smile and ignoring Mrs. Pollifax. "And here comes Tom Henry. I think it's super our having a doctor with us as well as a noted travel writer, don't you?"

This was tactless, thought Mrs. Pollifax, and quite enough to antagonize the remaining men, but if she decided to reserve judgment on Mrs. Lovecraft for the moment she could welcome Dr. Henry wholeheartedly. He sat down next to her, crossed his legs, gave her a cheerful smile and said, "I hope dinner's soon, I'm starving."

"About five more minutes," Mrs. Pollifax told him after a glance at her watch. "Or just enough time to ask what Homer meant when he said you're at a mission hospital. Does that mean you live here in Zambia?"

He wrenched his eyes from Lisa Reed and turned to give her his full attention. "Yes it does — the hospital's over on the Zambesi River near the Angolan border. I came out from Canada three years ago and I'm sure all my friends expected me back in Windsor a week later." He gave her a sidelong boyish smile. "Needless to say I'm still here."

"You like it."

"Love it," he admitted. "So much so that I wanted to try a safari on my seven days' leave. There's so much about the bush I've been too busy to learn, and a great deal about wild animals I want to learn."

"Including *Homo sapiens*?" said Cyrus Reed, leaning forward to enter the conversation.

"Well, I see a good many of *them*," said Dr. Henry, smiling back, "but aside from several missionary families at the hospital it's been a long time since I've seen a group like this. I'd forgotten," he said dryly, "what a lot of nonsense people talk."

Cyrus Reed smiled. "I agree with you completely."

"What do you talk about at your hospital when you're relaxing?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

He grinned. "Oh — life, death, septicemia, who's due to boil the next drinking water, or what the village witch doctor said that day."

Mrs. Pollifax laughed. "Scarcely small talk."

"God, no." He looked chagrined. "Obviously I'll have to brush up on that." He smiled at Chanda as the boy walked into the campfire circle and came to stand beside him. "*Bweleniko*," he said. "*Mwapoleni*."

"*Kuntu kuli kusuma*," the boy said, smiling.

"*Endita*." Turning to Mrs. Pollifax he said, "Chanda talks Bemba but he speaks a little English now and understands it very well. When we first met I was struggling to learn Nyanga, and now I'm having to learn

Bemba, and it all grows rather confusing. Chanda, you've not met this gentleman yet. He's Mr. Cyrus Reed."

Chanda stepped forward and shook hands with Reed and then, to their surprise, clapped his hands three times. "That's the Zambian greeting," explained Dr. Henry with a grin. "Chanda's given you only the modified version. When it's done properly it's repeated three times . . . a handshake followed by three claps and then another round or two. Quite a ceremony."

"Certainly feel thoroughly greeted," admitted Reed.

Somewhat removed from them, Willem Kleiber said in alarm, "He's not—uh—yours, is he?"

Tom Henry's smile was friendly. "He is now. He was brought into the hospital half-dead, his entire village wiped out by fighting on the Angolan border. Freedom fighters brought him in."

Overhearing this, Lisa gasped, "You live there?"

He nodded.

"But that must be fascinating."

"It is," he said, meeting her glance with a faint smile.

At that moment a drum began beating to announce dinner. Mrs. Pollifax turned and saw that in the open-air dining room behind her a huge tureen was being carried in by a boy in a white jacket. She also saw Mr. McIntosh standing on the step, hesitating between them and the dining hall. He had changed into khaki slacks over which he wore a white shirt open at the neck and a black V-neck sweater, and she wondered if he was going to appear late at every meal and leave early, like a shadow. Intuitively she felt that he was an intensely private, introverted man, but having decided this she wondered how: was it the manner in which he looked out from under his brows, head slightly bent? or was it that his smile, which was surprisingly sweet, never changed or wavered? He simply stood and waited, smiling, while they left their chairs and moved toward him, and then, still smiling, he turned and walked toward the buffet table and placed himself in line.

With the arrival of McIntosh Mrs. Pollifax realized the safari group was now complete and she wondered, not for the first time, which of these people could be an assassin. Now that she'd met them all she found this a very jarring thought because they all looked so normal, even wholesome, and certainly all of them were — well, explainable, she reasoned, reaching for a word that eliminated the existence of sinister motives and façades. She could not imagine any of them a professional killer standing in a crowd with a gun in his pocket, waiting, measuring, judging, whipping out the gun and firing, then vanishing into the crowd. In the first place, none of these people looked capable of such brutal vi-

olence, and in the second place she couldn't imagine any of them managing such a thing without being noticed.

Cyrus Reed would certainly be noticed, she thought with an amused glance at him towering over the soup tureen. It was possible that without his goatee Mr. Kleiber might look sufficiently nondescript; it was also possible that Tom Henry was not a doctor at all. McIntosh, she thought, would certainly melt into a crowd he was doing so right now; John Steeves was too distinguished to melt, but she knew from his books that he was a genius at disguising himself.

If Carstairs was right, she thought, one of them had to be wearing a devilishly clever mask . . . and then she recalled with interest Carstairs' telephone call to her the evening before she left New Jersey. She had assured him that yes, her passport had been returned safely to her and that yes, Bishop had explained the importance of the snapshots, and then she had asked him the question that had begun to exasperate her. "I realize this is an insane world," she had told him, "but can you please tell me why an assassin would go on a *safari*?"

"Why, to meet someone, I imagine," Carstairs had said pleasantly. "Plan the next assassination, perhaps, or be paid for the last one. Certainly not for *fun*."

If this was true—and Carstairs' suppositions nearly always proved sound there could be two people wearing masks on this safari, each watching the others and wondering, as she was doing . . . and this meant that eventually they would have to go off together for a good little chat, didn't it? It occurred to her that if she was very observant and very discreet she might be able to do a little eavesdropping . . .

Of course Carstairs had made it very clear to her that she was to do nothing but take photographs, and she planned to do a very *good* job with her picture-taking, but now that she thought about it, it seemed incredible waste for her to be here on the spot and not do a little spying as well. After all, it was taxpayers' money that was paying for her safari, she thought virtuously, and as a taxpayer herself she abhorred waste.

Besides, she added, dropping all pretense at justification, it would be such fun to surprise Carstairs and catch Aristotle.

CHAPTER 6

IN THE MORNING THE SAFARI OFFICIALLY BEGAN WITH THE GAME-viewing excursion up the river before leaving for Kafwala camp. Mrs. Pollifax came to breakfast early and still a little sleepy, for it was barely seven and she'd not slept with any continuity. The walls of her cabin had rustled all night -she was convinced that some small animal lived in them—and at one point she had awakened to a loud animal cry, followed by a soft whistle and the pounding of feet. After this another fruit had dropped from the tree outside her cabin, and the reeds had begun to whisper again . . . At breakfast Julian told her that animals roamed freely through the camp at night, that a hippo had been heard and that pukus, who liked the safety of the camp at night, made soft whistling sounds. It was just as well she'd not known, she reflected, or she might never have dared fall asleep again.

"I want you to meet Crispin now," Julian said as they rose from the breakfast table. "I will be staying at camp to make final arrangements for our trip at noon, and Crispin will take you game-viewing. He's assistant safari manager and he'll be with us for the entire safari."

Crispin was not in uniform, and looked surprisingly like an eager schoolboy in his flowered shirt, dark trousers and sneakers. He had a long slender face and bright, interested eyes. He actually looked excited about taking them out game-viewing, and Mrs. Pollifax found this rather endearing.

John Steeves said, "Crispin's even more English than Julian. What are your Zambian names?"

"Mine?" Julian laughed. "You want it all at once? Milimo Simoko Chikwanda."

Steeves grinned. "I'll call you Julian. And Crispin's?"

"Wamufu Chinyanta Muchona."

Steeves nodded. "Definitely Julian and Crispin."

"I think so," Julian said in amusement.

There was a charming picnic air about the excursion up the river. The sun was soft and golden, the river full of morning sounds, and they traveled on a splendid breakfast of bacon and eggs, sausage, toast and coffee. Mr. Kleiber, sitting next to Mrs. Pollifax, went so far as to confide that he would like to see a crocodile. Across the aisle Amy Lovecraft had blossomed out with a professional-looking camera loaded with all kinds of attachments that she tried to explain to John Steeves. The Reeds sat together in front, both looking sleepy; Tom Henry and Chanda stood in the stern of the boat and McIntosh by himself in the bow; he too bristled with cameras and light meters.

Abruptly Crispin called out to the boy at the wheel, gestured, and the launch headed across to the opposite bank, at which point Mrs. Pollifax lifted her camera and took a picture of the river ahead, managing to capture several profiles at the same time. She had already taken a snapshot of everyone climbing into the boat and no one seemed to have minded except Cyrus Reed, who had glanced at her reproachfully, as if he'd not expected this of her.

"Hippo," said Crispin in a low voice, and pointed.

Every head turned to the left, the launch slowed and they coasted toward a cleft in the tangle of roots and trees that lined the riverbank. Slowly they drew abreast of a dark, secret-looking inlet of water that flowed into the river, and as they reached this narrow tributary Mrs. Pollifax looked deep into its shadows and saw enormous shapes moving through the trees, and suddenly heard a thunderous roar as the first hippo plunged into the stream. Patches of sunlight glinted across monstrous black heads as the hippos floated and bobbed out into the river. She counted five, six, seven hippos and gave up counting at eleven. They kept coming, whole families snorting and cavorting with ponderous mischievousness, one of the bolder ones swimming out near the launch to give them all a curious stare.

Mrs. Pollifax laughed, and when the launch resumed its trip upriver the others were smiling too and began to talk and move about the boat. McIntosh peeled off his jacket and came to stand next to Mrs. Pollifax, his camera at the ready. Without his jacket, only a short-sleeved polo shirt remained and she thought it made him look rather flat-chested. His posture was not good but then, she thought forgivingly, it would be impossible for anyone to stand erect if they insisted on peering out at the world from under their eyebrows; a certain amount of slumping was compulsive. She noticed that his longish black hair badly needed a

shampoo but the threads of white in it were dramatic against his tanned face.

"I hope you don't mind," he said with his faint smile, and sat down on the edge of the bench next her, his eyes on the shoreline.

"Not at all," she said. "That's a handsome camera you have. I've been admiring it."

He glanced at her, his smile deepening, and told her what kind it was.

"Lovely," she said, not understanding a word, and then with a bright smile, "Where do you make your home, Mr. McIntosh?"

"Pretty much out of my attaché case," he said, smiling.

"But you're American, aren't you?"

"An American citizen, yes."

"Then do you," she asked reasonably, "live in the United States?"

"Not really," he said, smiling. "I come and go." He lifted his camera and snapped a picture of the riverbank, and then as Crispin called out "Egret!" he slipped away from her to the rear of the boat.

Behind her Amy Lovecraft leaned forward and said, "He's impossible to talk to, isn't he? I couldn't even get a direct yes or no from him on whether he's married. I mean, surely that's something you could answer yes or no to? A man either has a wife or he hasn't."

Mrs. Pollifax turned to smile into her vivid sapphire-blue eyes. "You have a point there, although of course these days such matters are sometimes —"

"What's more," said Mrs. Lovecraft, lowering her voice, "I don't think McIntosh is his last name at all."

At this Mrs. Pollifax turned completely to face her. "Good heavens," she murmured, "really?"

Mrs. Lovecraft nodded. "When we registered at Chunga," she said, her voice becoming conspiratorial, "I was standing next him and I caught a glimpse of his passport. McIntosh is his *first* name. There was an entirely different name following it, something that began with an M too, but I couldn't make it out. And," she added indignantly, "I've never seen an American passport with the last name first. Julian may have accepted him as Mr. McIntosh because he doesn't *know*, but take a look at your own passport sometime: the last name *doesn't* come first."

"Amy," called Steeves from across the aisle, "you wanted to see some impala, take a look over here."

Mrs. Lovecraft jumped up, leaving Mrs. Pollifax to digest this interesting piece of information. *Not* a sensible woman, thought Mrs. Pollifax, watching her leave; stupid of her to go about saying such things, indebted as Mrs. Pollifax was to her for the news. She might have thought it exposed McIntosh, but it also betrayed her spitefulness at being ig-

nored by him. She wondered if Amy Lovecraft's life had been difficult: she was a very attractive woman and must once have been lovely, but so very often beautiful women grew up lopsided or didn't grow at all. She thought there was a curious hardness about her, as if her beauty was a deceptively rich topsoil, thinly spread over rock. . . . Finding that no one was looking in her direction, Mrs. Pollifax reached into her purse and surreptitiously examined her passport. Mrs. Lovecraft was absolutely right: there was no juxtaposition of names, the given name came first.

"Having fun?" asked Cyrus Reed, walking up the aisle.

"Oh yes," she said, beaming at him, and then, thinking of what Mrs. Lovecraft had just told her, she added, "and I'm learning so much, it's really so educational."

At midmorning they stopped briefly at an abandoned ferry crossing where the remains of a road cut like a knife through the tall grass. Crispin allowed them to climb out for a moment and walk a few cautious paces down the road. "But not far," he said firmly. "Not without a guard."

"Why should we need a guard?" protested Mrs. Pollifax.

"It's dangerous."

She looked out upon the peaceful scene, at bright petunia-like flowers blooming by the roadside, at a landscape empty of all movement, and she was incredulous. "But it looks so safe!"

Tom Henry grinned. "It does, doesn't it? But we're near the river, you know, which means if you left the road you might stumble across a crocodile sunning itself in the mud. Failing that, there are puff adders, pythons, black mambas and bushwangers, not to mention the possibility of a rhino or hippo who might be in an ugly temper."

"Oh," said Mrs. Pollifax, taken aback.

Crispin said, "You treat many snake bites at your hospital, Doctor?"

"Maybe not so successfully as your village medicine men," said Tom, "but we save a few. Speaking of medicine men, it's certainly humbling to realize that people here evolved their own vaccine centuries before we did in the laboratories."

Crispin said modestly, "We are in the position to learn, you know. We see the mongoose fight with a poisonous snake, he is bitten, he runs to a certain bush and eats the leaves and lives. The medicine man studies all these signs."

Steeves said, "And which do you visit, Crispin, when you feel ill?"

Crispin grinned. "I would go first to the medical doctor," he said, his eyes laughing, "and then I would visit the medicine man just to be sure."

"Covering all your bets," chuckled Dr. Henry as they climbed back into the boat.

Lisa, standing on the bank next to Mrs. Pollifax, said in a low voice, "Care to bet whose arms Mrs. Lovecraft is going to fall into?"

She had misjudged her, however; Amy Lovecraft graciously accepted Crispin's hand, stepped onto the bow of the boat and remained there for a long moment, her profile turned to the sky, before allowing John Steeves to help her inside.

"What's your deadliest snake?" Reed asked Crispin, which brought a laugh from Lisa.

"Oh the viper," he said. "You are bitten, and in ten minutes you die."

"Good heavens!"

"The black mamba is second, killing in ten or fifteen minutes. If you go to the zoo in Lusaka the snake man will tell you all about it. He will also tell you snakes neither see nor hear, they only sense vibrations." He grinned. "Therefore if you meet a snake and stand perfectly still it won't find you."

"I couldn't possibly stand still," said Lisa, shivering. "I'd run like blazes."

Mrs. Pollifax looked at Crispin, and then she looked at the dark, jungle-like banks of the river lined with twisted roots like claws, deep shadows, tangles of brush and palm and the white tracery of dead roots. She thought of the disciplines needed in this country to avoid sudden painful death and she acknowledged ruefully that survival here was a trifle different from crossing on the green light.

Some forty-five minutes later they reached Chunga camp again. They had seen an egret, a cormorant and a group of impala and hippos, and Julian was waiting on the dock to tell Mrs. Pollifax that a policeman from Lusaka had arrived to ask her questions.

"He arrived fifteen minutes ago," Julian said, helping her out of the launch, "and I told him I will bring you to him. He's seated over there in a chair behind the trees, very private."

There was no curiosity in Julian's candid gaze; in Mrs. Pollifax, however, there was considerable curiosity and she admitted to being startled. "You're quite certain it's me he wants to see?"

"Oh yes," said Julian simply, "he has driven all the way from Lusaka to see you."

"That's a long drive."

"Anything wrong?" asked Cyrus Reed.

Mrs. Pollifax realized that she had been the first person off the boat and now the others had arrived behind her and were listening. She smiled, shook her head and followed Julian to the appointed place,

which was indeed private, being nearly encircled by palms. A slender young man in a dark-blue uniform rose. He looked self-contained and very polite, his black face thin and intelligent. "Mrs. Pollifax?"

She assured him that she was Mrs. Pollifax and sat down.

A small table had been placed in front of him on which rested a half-finished Coke and a notebook. He now placed the notebook on his lap and drew out a pen.

"I have come, madam," he said, pronouncing the word m'domm, "to inquire about your advertisement in this morning's *Times of Zambia*. A most curious advertisement, surely?"

"My adver—oh," she said, comprehension dawning, "it's been published today? I'm so glad. The young man said it would be, of course, but I've completely lost track of time, and " She stopped, aware that her interrogator was waiting patiently for her to finish. "I'm sorry," she said. "I hope I didn't break any law?"

He looked as if he were seated at a garden party balancing a cup of tea on his knees instead of a notebook but his eyes were very watchful. "This man John Sebastian Farrell." He pronounced the name precisely and carefully. "You know this person?"

She nodded. "Yes, of course, or rather I used to. I'm trying to find him. You haven't haven't come to tell me where he is, have you?"

"No, madam."

"For that matter," she added thoughtfully, "my name wasn't mentioned in the advertisement at all."

"The *Times* office gave me your name, madam, after which I contacted the tourist bureau to learn your itinerary. Now this man," he continued, courteous but resolute. "What causes you to believe he is in Zambia?"

Mrs. Pollifax started to reply and then stopped, suddenly anxious. "Is there something wrong? I don't understand—"

"If you will just answer—"

"Yes, of course," she said. "A mutual friend told me that he's living in Zambia and that he receives his mail in care of Barclay's Bank in Lusaka. I looked first in the telephone directory, but since his name wasn't listed I went to Barclay's Bank, where they told me his mail is collected very seldom and they had no forwarding address for him. So I thought of advertising." She paused, waiting, while he wrote this down. "Why?" she asked. "You surely haven't driven all the way from Lusaka to—"

"May I ask the name of your friend?"

"Friend?" she repeated blankly. "You can't possibly mean "

"The mutual friend who told you this man lives in Zambia."

This sounded serious indeed. She said after a moment's hesitation, "Bishop. William Bishop."

"His address, please?"

"*Bishop's* address?" She was astonished but struggled gamely to remember where she sent Bishop's Christmas card. "Georgetown, in the District of Columbia," she said at last. "The Laurel Apartments, I believe. In the United States."

"Thank you," he said.

"And now that I've told you all this," she said firmly, "you will tell me, please, why it's so important?"

He put down his pen and folded away his notebook. "You are aware, madam, that you register and show your passport everywhere you go, so that no one may enter this country illegally."

"But I didn't enter—" She stopped in dismay. "You mean Mr. Farrell may be in your country illegally?"

"I did not say that, madam," he said politely. "I am checking into this matter."

"I see," she said, and then added accusingly, "Farrell is a very fine man, Lieutenant—"

"Lieutenant Bwanausi. Dunduzu Bwanausi."

"Lieutenant Bwanausi," she repeated bravely, and won a faint smile from him; in fact, he looked considerably friendlier as he rose from his chair. "That is quite possible, madam. We will see. I hope you enjoy your safari. Good day, madam."

She watched him go, her face troubled as she thought of the long dusty trip he had made here from Lusaka, and the long dusty trip back; it certainly did not imply any casual interest in Farrell. She felt, too, that there was something that she had missed during the interview, something wrong about it that she couldn't put her finger on. She sat and tried to reconstruct the interview.

A flock of tiny brilliant birds pecked at the earth around her. She heard the palms behind her stir once, convulsively, and then the sound of the launch starting up, followed by the steady putt-putt of its motor as it backed and headed downriver to return Lieutenant Bwanausi to his car. The sun was growing intense on the back of her neck, the air was dead-calm with a complete absence of wind or breeze.

There was no breeze, she thought, and yet the palms had rattled stridently a moment or two ago, a fact that her mind had registered without her being aware of it. Very odd, she decided, and swiftly, soundlessly left her chair. The palms were silent now, and quite empty. She moved in among them listening to the sound made as her shoulders brushed against the brittle dry fronds. She tried tapping a single branch with her

fingers to see if a small bird or animal could have rustled them, but she found this quite impossible; someone human had to have disturbed the palms to make the sound she'd heard, someone standing and listening to Lieutenant Bwanausi.

She pushed through the bushes and out to the earthen path behind them and looked toward the dining hall. The distance was not far, and anyone could have reached it from this point in a matter of seconds. There was no one in sight. Walking quickly she passed the office and saw Mrs. Lovecraft leaning over the desk talking animatedly with Julian; she continued through the bar to the dining room and counted heads: the rest of the party were seated there waiting for lunch, relaxed, sprawling in their chairs, laughing at something Chanda had said.

She withdrew before she could be noticed, realizing that it could have been any one of them. It could have been Cyrus Reed, who seemed to be keeping a very firm eye on her, or it could have been Amy Lovecraft, who had already ferreted out something to gossip about in McIntosh. But Amy so much preferred males that it was difficult for Mrs. Pollifax to imagine her curiosity extending to any female in the party.

Or it could, she reflected, have been the one person among them who would find the arrival of a policeman disturbing: *Aristotle*.

She did not like this thought. Remembering they were to leave for Kafwala immediately after lunch, she turned and hurried up the path to Leopard cabin to finish packing her suitcase.

CHAPTER 7

"THE *MWAMFULI* I COULD CARRY," CHANDA SAID AS MRS. POLLIFAX prepared to board the pontoon boat after lunch.

Mrs. Pollifax was about to say that one multicolored parasol was no bother at all for her, but seeing the look on Chanda's face she promptly handed it over to him, and then demonstrated how it worked. The pontoon boat set off with them once again sitting on packing cases, but Chanda made the trip standing in the bow under her umbrella, a broad grin on his face.

There were three Land Rovers waiting for them when they reached shore. Mrs. Pollifax, who had not yet considered the logistics of supplying a safari, stood and watched as their luggage was piled into one of the Land Rovers, followed by a sack of potatoes, a huge bag of green beans, two cases of beer and an insulated box filled to the brim with frozen chickens and steaks.

"Looks as if we'll eat well," Mr. Kleiber said in a pleased voice.

"Yes, doesn't it?" said Mrs. Pollifax, and recognizing the moment as an auspicious one -they were all standing in clusters watching -she lifted her camera and took a close-up picture of Mr. Kleiber.

"My yogurt lunches back home seem pathetic here," Lisa told Dr. Henry, and Mrs. Pollifax snapped a picture of them too, smiling at each other in the sun.

It was not the first time that she had noticed them smiling at each other. It had happened during the trip upriver this morning, and again at lunch, yet so far as she knew Lisa and Dr. Henry had exchanged no more than a few pleasantries, and Lisa was nearly always in the company of John Steeves, who seemed quite stricken by her. Mrs. Pollifax waited now for Tom Henry's response to this remark. He said, "Yes," and continued looking at Lisa until her smile deepened and she turned

away as if, thought Mrs. Pollifax, an entire conversation had just passed between them.

"I hope you're going to take my picture too," said Steeves.

"Oh, especially yours," Mrs. Pollifax told him, hating herself for gushing, "because my children will be so thrilled." She was conscious as she said this of Cyrus Reed turning and observing her with some astonishment. Really, she thought, Mr. Reed's attention, or rather his expectations of her, were going to prove extremely difficult on this trip. In a spirit of defiance she pointed her camera at him and took his picture too. She was completing her collection with a snapshot of Julian standing beside the Land Rover when he gestured to her to climb inside.

"You'll ride with me," he said, and helped her to climb up to the front seat.

She was joined almost immediately by a guard with a long rifle, the same guard who had opened the gate for them the day before, lean and graceful, dressed in khaki shorts and the same moth-eaten gray sweater. Then Lisa strolled over, followed by John Steeves, McIntosh and Amy Lovecraft. The Land Rover with their luggage had already started; Julian shouted at Crispin, climbed in, waved, and they too were off, leaving the others still arranging themselves in the third vehicle.

"Will they have a guard too?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

Julian turned and looked at her with amusement. "Yes, of course. You still do not believe?"

Lisa leaned over and said, "Well, it *is* a park."

"I've heard," said Mrs. Lovecraft, "that Americans are accustomed to feeding the animals."

Julian grinned and shook his head. "It is safe most of the time so long as one remains on the roads, and in daylight, but even on the road—one of the guides at Luangwa Park was driving along like this three years ago when he was charged by a wounded buffalo. There was not much left of the Land Rover, I can tell you, and if the buffalo had not been quickly shot by the guard there would have been not much left of my friend either."

"I see," said Mrs. Pollifax, blinking. "What -uh happens if you do have an emergency out here in the bush?"

"Oh, we have marconis," he explained, deftly steering the car around a hole. "At Chunga there is a first-aid station too."

"Marconis?"

"Radio. Already this morning guests have used it. You sent a message to Lusaka, didn't you, Mrs. Lovecraft?"

"Yes," she said curtly.

"I did too," volunteered McIntosh.

"And if there is a serious emergency a Flying Doctor comes, but with Doctor Henry here—"

"*Nyalugwe*," said the guard sharply, and Julian braked.

"He says 'leopard.' " Julian stopped the Land Rover, and the only sounds were of McIntosh and Amy Lovecraft bringing out cameras and checking them; Mrs. Pollifax already held hers in her lap.

"There," said Julian, pointing, and on the crest of a small hill they saw a leopard standing in a tangle of thorn bush, his spots melting perfectly into the background. He turned and looked at them for a long moment, and then he lifted his magnificent blond head and walked away into the bush.

"My God how beautiful," whispered Lisa. "When you think that some silly woman would turn that fabulous creature into a fur coat—"

"Thank heaven for game parks," said Mrs. Pollifax. "Did you see his eyes, did you see those muscles when he moved?"

"Splendid specimen," said Steeves. "I've seen panthers before but never a leopard walking free."

"I believe I caught him on film," McIntosh said with satisfaction.

"Me, too," added Mrs. Lovecraft. "Thrilling."

"I missed," said Mrs. Pollifax sadly. "I was too busy looking."

They drove on along the dusty, shadeless road, of necessity driving slowly. Ahead of them a dozen black-and-white pin-striped fowl broke into a hurried trot. "Guinea fowl," said Julian, and honked the horn, which only caused the guinea fowl to scurry faster, their plump rear-ends registering their indignation until a second beep from the horn persuaded them to the right, and off the road. The Land Rover did not stop again, and as the road grew bumpier the interior of the car grew warmer; the guard in the rear slapped uninhibitedly at tse-tse flies and no one spoke. They came eventually to an intersection marked *Kafwala 11 km.* and headed down a new dirt road. Its surface was dotted with elephant droppings, and the Land Rover rattled ominously as it hit the holes left by their crossing during the rainy season. The terrain was becoming heavily wooded now, with trees on either side of the road.

It was nearing three o'clock when they reached Kafwala, entering it from the rear where a man stood patiently ironing clothes on a slab of wood with a heavy old-fashioned iron. Half a dozen men lazed around a fire watching him and talking; they looked up eagerly at the sound of the Land Rover, which bumped past them and came to a halt in the middle of a grassy compound encircled by tents and white cement huts with thatched roofs. Directly ahead of them stood a long white building with an arcade in its center; beyond it the earth sloped sharply down to the

river. As soon as Julian cut the engine Mrs. Pollifax could hear the sound of rapids.

"This is Kafwala," announced Julian, and jumped down from the Land Rover. "Here we stay for two days, game-viewing, before driving north to Moshe."

"Now this looks like a real camp," said Lisa with satisfaction. "Primitive. I think I'm going to like Kafwala very much." She turned and gave Mrs. Pollifax a hand. "Can you still walk? I feel as if I've been massaged all over. Crispin said there's a bathtub here, can you imagine? How on earth do you suppose they manage it?"

"They manage it," said Mrs. Lovecraft, climbing down, "by heating the water in a Rhodesian oven." She glanced around and pointed. "There it is, do you see? There's a drum of water inside that huge square of cement, they light a fire under it and the pipes carry the hot water to the tub or shower."

"Damned ingenious," murmured McIntosh. "I'll have to take a look at that."

"Yes, but how do you know such things?" asked Lisa.

"Oh my dear," she said in her slightly nasal voice, "I'm what you'd call a Colonial, I've lived in Africa all my life. In the Sudan, in South Africa, in Zambia, in Kenya."

Mrs. Pollifax looked at her with interest; she thought this explained her air of being British without being English. "Army?"

Mrs. Lovecraft turned and looked at her. "My father, yes. Not my husband. We had a tobacco farm until his death. Not far from here, farther south."

"I'm sorry."

"Oh sorry," said Mrs. Lovecraft, and a scornful, bitter look crossed her face. "But you're a widow, too, aren't you?" She turned away abruptly and smiled at McIntosh. "I'm ready for a drink, ducks, aren't you?"

The Land Rover carrying their luggage bumped its way into camp and the Zambians surrounded it, laughing. Julian waved and then turned to Mrs. Pollifax. "Let me show you your room," he said, leading her toward the arcade set into the center of the long building. "Here," he said, pointing to a door set into the passageway, and then throwing open the opposite door he gestured to Lisa. "You and your father will be here, across from Mrs. Pollifax. Tea is at four, ladies," and with this he hurried off to distribute the others.

Lisa said, "Care for a look at the river?"

Mrs. Pollifax had opened the door to her room there were no locks or keys—and was peering inside. It was dim because of the tall trees

surrounding the building, but she saw the usual two beds shrouded in netting with a chamber-pot under each, a nightstand with a candle, but, most delightful of all, frosted glass windows and thick white walls. There would be no rustling noises tonight.

"A bit dark but very snug," said Lisa, looking over her shoulder. "I wonder if you'll have a roommate?"

"There's only Mrs. Lovecraft," pointed out Mrs. Pollifax.

She and Lisa exchanged a doubtful glance and Lisa laughed. "She's rather awful, isn't she? All that jewelry and pseudo-helplessness but under the fluff I'm beginning to sense the iron-hand-in-the-velvet-glove syndrome. My father had the effrontery to tell me last night that I'll end up just like her if I'm not careful."

"Now, that," said Mrs. Pollifax firmly, "is utterly impossible."

Lisa laughed. "That's because you didn't meet me in my executive phase. I've really been quite a trial to Dad, I confess. He's an absolute dear but a great worrier. Heaven knows I've given him cause, though. There was a man, you see, and until he decamped I thought he'd solve all my problems."

"As no man can, of course," said Mrs. Pollifax.

Lisa nodded. "Yes, I see that now but for a long time I blamed myself, I felt so—so unlovable, you know? So I went to the opposite extreme and and amputated every emotion that bubbled up, but of course that was ridiculous. It's taken me forever to understand that I'm still myself, and really a rather nice person, and that I just picked a lemon. I'm glad now," she said, smiling warmly at Mrs. Pollifax. "I don't know why I'm telling you all this –probably because I'll burst if I don't tell someone, and you look so—so human—but Africa's having the most tremendous impact on me. Ever since we arrived I've been having the strangest dreams at night, and seeing life and myself in the most astonishing perspective. This country's returning me to something I lost, it's disinhibiting me. Do you find this alarming?"

"No," said Mrs. Pollifax, smiling as she considered it. "No, because I've been here just long enough to see what you mean. Time seems very different here, as if it stopped and has only just begun again, and everything's new. And yet at the same time it's very old, pre-Biblically old, as if the world itself began here." She stopped and laughed. "Obviously I can't put it into words."

"One can't," Lisa said eagerly as they began walking down the path to the river under huge, ancient trees. "Not important emotions. And yet, you know, under the surface there seems to be a great deal going on here. I had a very spooky thing happen to me yesterday when I was driving back to Lusaka. I thought I'd deliver this woman and her child di-

rectly to their village, which was about a mile off the main road, but after dropping them off I must have made a wrong turn because I couldn't find my way back, not even to her village." She paused and added with a shiver, "I kept driving until I was really lost, and then I came to a roadblock on this dusty, deserted road and—really it was terrifying I was suddenly surrounded by soldiers or police, I don't know which they were."

"Good heavens," said Mrs. Pollifax, startled.

Lisa nodded. "About twenty of them, all with rifles. They were terribly nice but at the same time they checked everything, my passport and visa, my luggage, the car. They must have kept me there for nearly an hour answering questions: why I was on that road, and where I was going, where I'd been, how long I was to be in Zambia and why I'd come to Zambia in the first place."

"Where did this happen?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

Lisa frowned. "Somewhere down in the Kafue Flats area that's what the map said, anyway."

"The driver who brought us to Chunga," said Mrs. Pollifax, "spoke of spies—Rhodesian spies—infiltrating Zambia."

"Probably," said Lisa. "There have been guerilla raids all along the Rhodesian border except Africans call it Zambabwe, you know and deep inside the country too. Not by Zambians but by revolutionaries crossing through Zambia, so I suppose the Rhodesians send people into this country as well. But if I lived next door to an *apartheid* country," she said hotly, "I don't think I'd sit on my hands either. I think it's terribly unfair that a minority of two hundred and fifty thousand white people have absolute power over six million natives and *squash* them. After all, it's their country."

"In general," said Mrs. Pollifax mildly, "the Golden Rule seems to be the last rule applied to any situation these days." They had reached the riverbank and she thought how incongruous it was to speak of violence in such a setting. On their left the water raced over great primeval boulders, shooting up plumes of spray and caressing the ear with its stormy descent. Once beyond the rocks the water gentled, sending small ripples to the shore at their feet until on their right it flowed smoothly around an island and became almost a backwash before it continued on its way south, to Chunga camp and beyond. There were several rough chairs placed near the bank, and a circle of them at the empty campfire site. "Rhodesia *is* very near," she said, sitting down in one of the chairs, "and Zambia used to be Northern Rhodesia, didn't it?"

"Oh yes," said Lisa, "but until you've visited Livingstone you've no idea *how* near. Half of Victoria Falls is in Rhodesia. I took one of those

sundown cruises out of Livingstone, and one side of the river was Zambian and the other Rhodesian. The guide said we were under observation the entire time, because the river's the only barrier, and people can cross at night. In fact—"

She stopped as a voice hailed them from the top of the hill: the third Land Rover had arrived and John Steeves was descending, followed by Amy Lovecraft, Dr. Henry and—very gingerly Willem Kleiber. A multicolored parasol next came into view, with Chanda under it. A moment later Cyrus Reed and McIntosh began descending the hill too, as well as a young man wearing a white linen jacket and carrying a tray of glasses.

Dr. Henry sat down near Lisa and smiled at her. "We saw a water buffalo, a number of puku and some impala."

She said, "We saw a leopard."

"I think," said John Steeves, taking the chair next to her, "that if you look very quickly into those palms to your left you can add a monkey to your list."

"Never mind the monkey," said Amy Lovecraft deflatingly. "Mrs. Pollifax, Julian asked me to tell you there's hot water now, and because there are so many of us we have to stagger our baths."

"And he's giving me first crack?" said Mrs. Pollifax. "Except I haven't the faintest idea where the bath is."

Chanda looked up and said eagerly, "I know where the *bafa* is, I will show you."

"Good, let's go," she told him, and rose from her chair to follow him up the hill. He chose to ignore the path and to leap gracefully from rock to rock, and for the first time she noticed the long puckered seam of a scar that ran up the back of his leg from the ankle to his thigh. She remembered Dr. Henry saying that he'd been nearly dead when he was brought into the hospital, and she wondered how many more scars there were. At the top of the hill he turned and waited for her, his eyes as luminous as if incandescent bulbs shone behind them.

"I move fast, like monkey," he said, grinning.

"You certainly do." Pausing to catch her breath she noticed a small chamois bag suspended about his neck on a string. "What's that, Chanda?" she asked, pointing.

He looked down in surprise, stuffed the bag quickly inside his shirt again and gave her a thoughtful look. "*Cumo*," he said guardedly. Suddenly his enormous smile was back. "You like to see? It is my treasure."

"Love to," she told him. "Is it secret?"

"Very secret," he said, and seemed grateful when she opened the door of her room and beckoned him inside. First he gravely returned her

parasol to her. "*Santi mukwai,*" he said, and then he removed the chamois bag from around his neck and knelt beside her bed to empty its contents across the blanket.

She found herself both touched and amused at what emerged, remembering her son Roger's similar collection at this age, except that a more sophisticated society had rendered Roger's treasures obsolete. In the bush, Chanda's collection still had immediate value.

"From *cifulo*," Chanda said, pointing past the wall of her hut. "*Mushi*. My home."

"Do you mean your home before you met Dr. Henry?"

"Before this," he said, pointing matter-of-factly to his scarred leg, and picking up objects from his collection he explained them one by one. "*Munga*—thorn," he said.

"*Munga,*" she repeated, nodding.

"*Bulobo*—fishhook. *Mwele*—knife." *Mwando* was a ball of string. *Lino* was a tooth—his own, she suspected, although his were white and gleaming. "And *cibiliti*," he added, holding up two safety matches.

"Yes, and a snake," she added, pointing to a dried skin.

"*Nsoka*," he said, smiling and nodding. "My father give me *nsoka*. He was hunter, very big man. He track game—*Ishanda Ionshe nama*. He teach me."

"So you'll be a hunter too?"

"Already a hunter," he said, grinning. "Very good one." She watched in silence as he returned his treasure to the chamois bag, his touch loving.

When he stood up she said quietly, "Thank you, Chanda."

"You *nunandi* now," he told her. "Friend. You and Dr. Henry. And now you have *bafa*," he said with his charming smile. "I show you."

Ten minutes later Mrs. Pollifax was seated in a hot tub in a small thatched hut, contentedly humming a song and reflecting that she was having a very good time on her safari and taking some very good pictures. Twenty minutes later, dressed again, she returned to her room and sat down on her bed to do a little planning about those pictures. Yesterday, for instance, she had completed her first film, tucked away now in her suitcase, and this morning she'd begun her second. That left four untouched cartridges, which meant—she made rapid mathematical computations—ninety-three more snapshots, many of which would have to be spent on animals and scenery. She was quite certain, however, that she'd already captured each of her traveling companions at least once on film, and this pleased her very much. Some of the pictures might not come out well, of course, but statistically it was a good beginning, and she thought that by tomorrow she could relax and become more casual

about her filming. She happily touched the four sealed yellow boxes of film lined up in her suitcase and then she slipped her hand into the pocket of her folded bush jacket to check the completed cartridge she'd packed away this morning.

The cartridge wasn't there.

Startled, Mrs. Pollifax picked up the jacket, turned each pocket inside out, shook the garment, tossed it across the bed and began digging through her suitcase. She could find no metal cartridge. She crawled under the bed and searched and then checked through her purse: no film. Thoroughly alarmed now, she picked up her suitcase and dumped the contents all over the bed and began a frenzied hunt.

Still there was no cartridge. Be calm, she thought, and sat down on the bed in the middle of bright sweaters, cold creams, slacks and sneakers, but there was no evading the fact that the film was missing. Yet she'd packed it this noon at Chunga camp before coming here, and several minutes later when the boy had come for her suitcase she'd reopened the bag to add her toothbrush, and the exposed film had still been there: she could see it now in her memory, sticking out of the pocket of her folded bush jacket. And since her suitcase had been locked during its journey to Kafwala there could have been no accident that would jar open the suitcase and scatter its contents. The film had been locked inside her suitcase when it left Chunga, and her suitcase had remained locked until she had opened it half an hour ago to extract a bar of soap for her bath. She'd reached inside without looking because she knew exactly where the soap was, but she'd had to unlock the suitcase to do so, and the lock had not been tampered with then . . .

But if the film wasn't lost — and it couldn't have been, she thought grimly, going over and over it — then it had to have been stolen, and stolen while she was taking a bath.

She sat without moving, allowing the shock of this to catch up with her, and it was a very real shock, with implications that left her a little dizzy. How frightfully arrogant she'd been, she thought, dashing about taking her snapshots so openly while all the time someone on this safari didn't want to be photographed. Someone had allowed her to snap as many of them as she pleased, and then her film had been quietly taken away from her. She had been discreetly and firmly put in her place.

Score one for Aristotle, she thought.

Brazen, of course, but so easy . . . an empty room with only an inside bolt on the door and no way of locking it on the outside, her suitcase unlocked and she in the bathtub . . .

A flicker of anger stirred in her, grew, and at last triumphed over her alarm: it appeared that she now had a definite adversary, faceless, name-

less and observant. She could assume that her burglar knew nothing about her except that she preferred faces mixed in with her scenery, but her unknown antagonist was clever, she knew that now. He had moved in early, counting on her not noticing, counting on her being a dithery, rather silly woman addicted to snapshots. He would do better next time, she thought, to leave an unexposed film behind him, because even silly dithery women noticed when too many exposed films disappeared.

But in the meantime she had lost twenty valuable pictures, and unless she could outthink her burglar she was doomed to see her completed films picked off like flies. It was also disturbing to realize that her collection was reduced to the six or seven snapshots still in her camera . . . or had these been tampered with too? The camera still registered seven snapshots on its gauge, and the cartridge looked untouched, but just to be certain she removed the film, put in a fresh one and dropped the half-completed one in her purse. The sealed boxes she hid: one in her tote-bag, one in the toe of a sneaker, the last inside her purse.

Defiantly she decided that she would continue her snapshot-taking with an enthusiasm certain to annoy her adversary, but it was time now to turn to her lapel-pin camera. She had worn the latter pinned to her sweater and by now her companions must be accustomed to seeing her wear it, incongruous as it looked with casual clothes. She would continue to wear it doggedly.

Still shaken by her discovery she repacked her suitcase and locked it. As she left her room she found Cyrus Reed opening the door of the room on the other side of the arcade. He turned, looking genuinely surprised. "You're there?" he said. "Good, we're neighbors."

Even if it was he who had stolen her film, she thought it might be wise to mention her discovery of its disappearance. "If you've been down by the river," she said, "I wonder if you could tell me — or remember — just who left the group to walk up this way past my room?"

Reed looked from her to the door behind her and his brows lifted. "Something missing?" he asked quietly.

She nodded. "Yes, while I was in that building over there taking a bath. But I don't," she added, "want to cause a fuss."

"Quite right," he said. "Very sensible. And you want to know who left the party . . . Have to say nearly everyone," he said regretfully. "Let's see . . . good lord, even I left. Spilled some beer on my slacks, came up to change. Steeves ran out of film—passed him coming up as I went back. McIntosh left to take a nap — still gone. Kleiber came up for a map to prove some point or other, Lisa for a sweater. Chanda went with you and didn't return. Yes, I'd say the only two who stayed by the river were Mrs. Lovecraft and Dr. Henry. Nothing too valuable, I hope?"

"Fairly so, yes. To me."

"Don't like to hear that. You gave a thorough search? But of course you would." He placed the emphasis on *you* very flatteringly.

She gave him a smile and took a few steps toward the path. "A very efficient list, Mr. Reed. Thank you."

"No," he said firmly.

She turned in surprise.

"*Not* Mr. Reed. Call me Cyrus."

"Oh." She hesitated and then nodded. "And my name's Emily." As she descended the hill, leaving him behind, she realized that she felt obscurely better and was even smiling. A rather fatuous smile, she guessed, but still she was smiling.

By half-past six there was a crackling fire down by the river, the sole illumination except for a lantern hung from a post. They sat in a circle around the fire, drawn closer by the darkness beyond them and by the feeling of being very small under the huge trees and beside the roaring river. They sat and talked and sipped beer. The only activity came from two people: one the grave-faced young man in a white jacket who came down the hill bearing silverware, napkins and plates, then went up again and returned with cups and saucers, more beer and glassware. The other was Mrs. Pollifax who, with a flashcube attached to her camera, knelt, hovered, stood, sat and wickedly took picture after picture.

"Why do you bother," asked Mr. Kleiber curiously, "When you don't have a good German camera like Mr. McIntosh or Mrs. Lovecraft?"

"Oh, but this camera is just fine for an amateur," she said. "I snap pictures just for my children, you know. They'll be fascinated, and then of course my grandchildren will love seeing the animals. I always try," she told him firmly, "to create a total background, so that they can step into the adventure and experience it too."

"And do you," asked Cyrus Reed dryly, "show slides?"

She gave him a level glance and without batting an eyelash, for she loathed slides, said, "Of course."

"Incredible," he said, staring at her.

On an inspired note she added, "As a matter of fact after dinner I'll bring down pictures of my grandchildren to show you. They're very *lovely* grandchildren."

"Really?" said Amy Lovecraft coldly.

The young waiter had just arrived bearing a large tray, followed by two young men carrying steaming dishes, and he chose this moment to announce that dinner was served. Mrs. Pollifax jumped up immediately and became the first to approach the food spread out on the table. She

was not surprised when she returned to her chair to find herself something of a pariah after her announcement about snapshots. Mr. Kleiber chose a seat as far removed from her as possible, and Mrs. Lovecraft, who had shown no real interest in Mr. Kleiber before, eagerly took the chair next him. Lisa, assuming a more neutral corner, was joined by Steeves as usual. Tom Henry found a seat not far from Lisa, and McIntosh, still smiling enigmatically, sat beside Julian.

Only Chanda and Cyrus Reed showed signs of not being infected. Chanda sat down cross-legged on the ground beside Mrs. Pollifax and gave her a dazzling white smile. "I sit here. You *nunandi*."

"Damn awkward eating from one's lap," growled Reed.

"Try a corner of this little table," suggested Mrs. Pollifax. "After all, the word safari means camping."

"*Touché*," he said, smiling. "Thanks. Incredibly good food. Can't imagine how they do such a *cordon bleu* job out here without electricity."

"There is big wood stove," Chanda told him eagerly, "and very fine cook. Julian calls him a—a chef."

Reed nodded. "That's it, then. Saw you up there poking around. Anyone else speak Bemba here?"

"*Cimo*," said Chanda, holding up one finger. "There is good life here in park, maybe I not be hunter."

"Tom said you're damn good at hunting and tracking and only twelve years old," pointed out Reed, deftly spearing a piece of steak. "Said you went off to see what's left of your old village on the Angolan border this spring, and hiked fifty miles through the bush alone."

Chanda's smile deepened. "Yes, that. He tell you about the lions?"

"Lions!" exclaimed Mrs. Pollifax.

"Three of 'em," said Reed, nodding, "but how did you know they were following you, Chanda?"

"Because—" Chanda hesitated. "I do not know name for *cula*."

Several chairs away, Julian said, "Frogs, Chanda."

"Ah! Yes. I hear them, you know. They make a frog sound, and then I cross *kamana*—"

"Brook," called Tom Henry.

"Yes, brook, and frogs are very noisy talking to each other. I walk more, and then " He lifted one hand and cut the air dramatically. "*Cula* sound stop. So I look for big tree to climb because it becomes dark, like now, and I know something follows me or the frogs would be making noise."

"Good heavens," said Lisa. They were all listening now.

"Three lions try to climb tree for me, but I am too high. I sit all night for them to go away."

"I take it they did eventually," said Steeves.

"But not until morning," put in Tom Henry.

"Yes, I climb down from tree but cannot walk. *Mwendo* become like tree too."

"He means he'd lost all circulation in his legs," explained Tom. "His limbs had become like the tree."

Chanda nodded. "So I hunt sticks and dry grass and after long time make fire rubbing sticks. This is very hard to do. For many hours I sit to warm myself at fire, and then I go."

"Something I can't imagine any American twelve-year-old doing," said Reed.

"Still, Africa's a shade more hospitable a country than Mongolia," put in Steeves. "There you've panthers and tigers, but even if the sun shines three hundred days a year you get tremendous winds and a horrendous wind-chill factor."

"Tigers we don't have," said Julian, "but tomorrow we look for lion for you."

"Oh, I do hope we see one," cried Lisa eagerly.

"What time do we start?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"Directly after breakfast, about half-past seven."

"Early," said Amy Lovecraft, making a face.

The white-jacketed waiter had brought down a new tray which he set upon the table. Now he bowed, his face grave, and said, "Pudding is served, please, ladies and gentlemen."

It was after the pudding that Tom Henry reminded Chanda he was tired today and it was time for him to invest in some sleep. The boy arose from his cross-legged stance on the ground, and at the same moment Mrs. Pollifax had a sudden, dazzling idea. She, too, arose. "I'll go up with Chanda," she said. "It's so dark I couldn't bring myself to go alone, but if we're breakfasting at seven –"

"What, no snapshots of your grandchildren?" asked Reed mischievously.

"I'm still catching up on my sleep," she said, ignoring him and picking up her purse. "Good night!"

A chorus of farewells followed her as she turned away from the fire. It was very dark outside the circle of light and Chanda took her hand and guided her. Pebbles slid underfoot; the sound of the rushing water behind them made a low musical backdrop, rather soporific, she thought, like the murmur of voices heard from a distant room. There

was a lantern waiting at the top of the hill, placed on a table in the center of the arcade. She turned and looked back at the campfire, counting heads. They were all there, no one had left. She said, "Chanda . . ."

"Yes, madam."

"Chanda, I wonder if you'd hide something for me keep something for me—in your *cumo* bag."

He stared at her, eyes clouded now, opaque, mysterious, so that she wondered if he understood.

"It's something important and quite small. Only until the safari ends," she added quickly. "It needs—needs hiding." She walked around the corner of the passageway out of the lantern's light and opened her camera and removed the film that she'd completed down by the campfire. When she held it out to Chanda he remained impassive, the expression in his eyes chilling, as if he looked into, through and beyond her into something she couldn't see. Then abruptly the mask splintered into smiles, the strange effect was gone and an enormous smile lighted up his eyes.

"Yes, secret," he said, nodding, and taking the cartridge from her hand he loosened the string of his chamois bag and dropped the film inside.

She realized that she had been holding her breath; she exhaled now in relief. "You're a real friend, Chanda."

"But of course—*nunandi*," he said, laughing, and raced off into the darkness, calling over his shoulder, "Good night, madam!"

She stared after him thoughtfully. She did hope he understood but at least in giving him one of her films she felt that she had diversified, and this lifted her spirits. Her glance moved to the fire at the rear of the camp where the silhouettes of half a dozen men crouched talking around the blaze. She turned to go to her room and jumped when she saw Cyrus Reed standing in the arcade watching her.

"Oh you startled me," she gasped, and wondered how long he'd been standing there and how much he'd seen.

He held out her sun-goggles and her umbrella. "Left these behind you," he said, handing them to her, and then, "Care for a stroll around the compound before turning in?"

She hesitated. "I do feel rather unexercised," she admitted.

"Good. Damn good display of Orion and the Pleiades if we can get away from the light of the fire. Tiresome down below after you left. Can't help noticing that Mrs. Lovecraft talks through her nose and Mr. Kleiber sniffs a great deal through his, and Steeves was running on about Mongolia, which is all very well but this is Africa."

She laughed. "You poor man."

"Not at all," he said amiably, taking her arm. "Decided to look for better company."

"I think your daughter Lisa's a darling, by the way."

"She is, isn't she? Seems to be thawing out now. Damn glad to see it."

"And you," she said, "are really a judge?"

He brought out his flashlight, checked it and nodded.

"A *phungu*, Julian tells me. The Nyanga word for judge or counselor."

"*Phungu*," she repeated, trying it out on the tongue. "Sounds a little like fungus. What sort of *phungu* were you before you retired? Did you have hundreds of exciting cases?"

"Strictly routine," he said, "except for the Rambeau-Jenkins case."

Mrs. Pollifax stopped in her tracks and stared at him. "Oh," she gasped, "do you think she murdered him?"

He had been staring up at the sky; now he turned and looked down at her and smiled his sleepy smile. "That, my dear, only God knows."

"But you were there, you presided, and I've so often wondered—"

"Ha—common fallacy, that," he told her. "We *phungus* never judge guilt or innocence, we judge evidence. The law isn't emotional, you know, it's cold and impersonal. Has to be."

"But you're not," she told him indignantly.

She could see his smile in the light of the campfire. "Don't ever tell anyone, my dear." He stopped and said, "With you the 'my dear' just slips out."

"Well, *I* think Nina Rambeau was innocent," she said, and hoped he wouldn't notice that she was blushing. She wondered how long it had been since anyone had called her "my dear." "Have you found Orion yet?"

He shook his head. "Glow from the men's campfire bleaches out the stars. Daresay if we wandered a little way up the road we could see better."

"Oh, do let's," she said.

He nodded pleasantly to the men around the campfire as they passed. "Just looking at the stars," he told them, pointing at the sky.

The men burst into smiles and nods.

"Damn lot livelier up here than down by the river," he said mildly as they left the fire behind and entered the road beyond.

They had ventured a few paces into the darkness when Mrs. Pollifax looked back and sighed. "It's the guard," she told Reed. "He's *following* us, isn't that ridiculous?"

"Not at all," said Reed thoughtfully. "Can't have it both ways, my dear."

"Can't—what do you mean by that?"

"Well," he said in his mild voice, "if you want to observe wild animals in perfect safety you capture them, bring 'em back to our world and look at them behind bars in a zoo. Here we're their guests," he pointed out. "Trespassers, actually. They run free, wild and protected, but we do *not*."

"Of course you're right," she said reluctantly. "It's just that it's so *confining* not to be able to leave camp without being followed."

"Doubt if anyone could confine you, my dear. Ought to mind his presence far more than you since I've every intention of kissing you."

She turned and looked at him in astonishment, which placed her in the perfect position for him to make good his intention. "Orion be damned," he said, and swept her into his arms.

Mrs. Pollifax gave a small squeak of protest, resisted briefly and then discovered that she fitted very nicely into the curve of his arm and that she enjoyed being kissed very much. When he let her go she promptly dropped her sun-goggles, her kerchief and her umbrella. "Oh," she stammered. "Oh dear."

He patiently retrieved them and handed them back to her. "And there," he said, grasping her hand and firmly holding it in his, "is Orion."

"Yes," she said, feeling very disoriented and breathless as she realized that she was not immune, after all, to huge and charming *phungus*. It was all very disconcerting, she thought—at her age, too—and then she lifted her gaze to the sky and was struck breathless all over again. "Oh," she whispered.

It was like standing in the center of a planetarium, the sky a huge bowl turned upside down and fitted snugly to the horizon and then filled with thousands upon thousands of stars. This, surely, was infinity, she thought, gazing up in awe, and slowly became aware of the silence surrounding them, a silence like the beginning or the end of the world.

It was interrupted by a cough from the guard some distance behind them. Cyrus said dryly, "I think we're keeping him, he's been patient with us long enough."

Without speaking they turned and walked back to camp.

When Mrs. Pollifax entered her room again it was already very cold and she paused only long enough to slip a new cartridge of film into her camera and to hide the camera under her pillow for the night. Blowing out the candle beside her bed she inserted herself between the blankets,

tucked the mosquito netting around her and was surprised to find her room still filled with light. She noticed now what had escaped her by daylight: the wall of the room over her door rose only to a height of eight feet. Between this and the inverted V of the rafters there was only mosquito netting, so that she could see the glow of the lantern in the passageway outside.

She lay gazing up at this light and thinking about her strange day, about her film being stolen and then about Cyrus Reed, who was proving very distracting indeed. She realized that she was going to have to discipline herself very severely; after all, for her this was no ordinary safari. She was here for a purpose, and if she was not attentive and very clever, then Aristotle would continue wandering around the world negotiating contracts to shoot more people and this would never do.

Never, she thought, and resolved to put Cyrus Reed completely out of her mind. She closed her eyes and then opened them when she heard voices and footsteps outside on the path. A moment later she recognized Amy Lovecraft's high-pitched laugh.

"I would have fallen, Mr. Kleiber, if you'd not rescued me like a knight in shining armor, you dear man. This path—"

Amy Lovecraft, thought Mrs. Pollifax, was definitely hunting something more than game.

"I do not understand," Mr. Kleiber said in his pedantic, humorless voice, "why one bulldozer could not be assigned to this hill. They have the bulldozers, I know. They use them on the roads, and with only one hour of work –"

"Are you in the construction business, Mr. Kleiber? You seem to know so much about machinery."

"Heavy machinery, yes. I sell worldwide. It's—"

Their voices blurred as they passed from the arcade into the compound; she heard one more brittle laugh pierce the stillness and then there was silence. Mrs. Pollifax had closed her eyes again when she heard fresh pebbles crunching underfoot outside the building. "Really beautiful," Lisa Reed was saying. "I love it, don't you?"

It was Tom Henry who replied. "Absolutely." A comfortable silence followed and then Tom said, "John Steeves is certainly very distinguished."

Lisa said carelessly, "Oh—distinguished, yes."

"As a matter of fact we've one of his paperbacks at the hospital. *One Hundred Nights in a Yurt*, I think. The chap who read it –"

"Tom."

"Mmmm?"

"Don't be a goose."

Tom Henry laughed. "Have a good sleep, my dear."

Mrs. Pollifax heard him walk away and Lisa open the door of the room opposite hers. A very interesting exchange of words, she thought, smiling, very interesting indeed, and wondered on whom she might eavesdrop next.

She was not kept waiting long: McIntosh came next through the arcade, talking to Cyrus, and for a man of smiling silence McIntosh had suddenly become very articulate. ". . . Monetary Fund, of course. You simply can't cure inflation unless nations stop going to the printing press. The world is being drowned in worthless paper . . . Irresponsible. Expedient, of course, but disastrous. No discipline without paper being backed by something."

"Gold?" inquired Cyrus.

"Probably, yes. We've not been on a gold standard since 1901. Governments sneer at it, of course, because it would force discipline on them. But mark my words, Reed, whole civilizations have become graveyards by corrupting their currency."

"You do considerable business between countries?"

"Oh yes, quite international, but of course multinational's the word these days. But I don't want to hold you up, we can continue this another time. Good night, Reed."

"Yes . . . Lions tomorrow. Good night."

The last to pass by her door were Julian and John Steeves, and they were walking much faster. ". . . oh, much better here," Julian was saying. "Too many young men of my country head for the cities, and this is bad. Lusaka is full of thieves and spies."

"Excellent sense," said Steeves. "I'm not very big on cities myself. I like your bush, it has a mystique . . ."

Mrs. Pollifax did not hear the rest because they had left the arcade and their voices faded. In any case she was growing warmer now, and with this came a voluptuous drowsiness: she closed her eyes and slept and dreamed of masks. In her dream she sat in a theater and one by one each member of the safari walked out on stage to form a single line facing her. It was only when they moved up to the footlights in unison that Mrs. Pollifax saw they were holding masks to their faces. At a given signal each mask was swept away, but underneath lay another mask, and then another and still another . . .

CHAPTER 8

WHEN MRS. POLLIFAX WOKE AT HALF-PAST SIX THE NEXT MORNING it was bone-chillingly cold. The young waiter who brought coffee to her room on a tray said, "Good morning, madam," and it was so cold that wisps of vapor curled from his lips to match the steam rising from the coffeepot. Mrs. Pollifax put one foot out of bed, poured coffee into a cup and carried it under the blankets with her, wondering if she would ever be warm again.

"I thought Africa was t-t-tropical," she protested at breakfast, which was served down by the river in the morning mist.

"We're four thousand feet above sea level," Julian reminded her with a flash of white teeth. "You are ready for lion? Perhaps it will warm you to hear that Crispin took the Land Rover out at dawn and found lion tracks six miles north of camp."

"Oh how wonderful!" gasped Mrs. Pollifax.

Almost as exciting was the news that overnight two of the Land Rover roofs had been removed so that they could ride standing up and scan the savannah for game, like professionals. Mrs. Pollifax could scarcely wait.

But in spite of her excitement she had not forgotten her resolve of the night before, and between breakfast and departure time she retired to her room to make a list for the day and contemplate it. *Find out*, she wrote, *who's traveled widely during the past eight months (France Costa Rica)*. To this she added: *Try McIntosh again, could be opening up. Mr. Kleiber: if good at machinery ask about guns. John Steeves: what disguises preferred?* She studied this memo and then lit a match and burned it.

They set out shortly afterward in the two Land Rovers, the sun higher now and promising warmth soon. For this excursion Mrs. Pollifax had

arranged her clothing in layers so that as the day advanced she could remove first her bush jacket, and then her heavy sweater, and then the pale-blue cardigan until eventually it was rather like peeling an artichoke, she thought—she would be resplendent in striped shirt and kerchief before the process reversed itself. She also carried her bright parasol and two rolls of film for her camera and wore her lapel pin.

As they left Kafwala camp behind and headed for the open savannah Mrs. Pollifax realized that, like Lisa, Africa was having its charismatic effect upon her: the road wound ahead of the Land Rover like textured brown ribbon, the high grass tawny on either side and the earth flat under the incredible arc of blue African sky. There were also the surreal notes: a candelabra tree, its limbs perfectly splayed, its blossoms a dull orange; a baobub tree smooth and silvery in the warm morning light, and when Mrs. Pollifax inquired of Julian what the cement posts along the road meant, Julian laughed. "Not cement—termite nests." Bringing the Land Rover to a halt he jumped out and kicked at the top one, exposing holes like a honeycomb.

It was Mrs. Pollifax who spotted the elephants first. "Oh look," she cried, and in both Land Rovers heads swiveled to the left. At some distance away from them a line of elephants was moving across the savannah, an entire family with three young ones among them.

"Baby *nsofu*," said Chanda, pointing and grinning.

"I count nine," volunteered Cyrus, standing beside her.

Mrs. Pollifax stood up on the seat and took three pictures in rapid succession, and then somewhat reluctantly slid down in the seat and snapped a close-up shot of John Steeves as he watched the procession.

"Can we get out?" called Amy Lovecraft, who was all beige and white today, with a green kerchief around her hair.

"Better if we drive ahead down the road," said Julian. "They're heading for water, we'll see them closer farther along."

The two Land Rovers inched ahead for half a mile and stopped, after which everyone climbed out and stood in a group waiting, cameras ready.

"This light," said Mrs. Pollifax, gesturing widely toward the sky. "It so reminds me of the light in southern France. The same luminous quality. Has anyone been in France lately?"

No one appeared to pay her the slightest attention; John Steeves stared inscrutably into the distance; McIntosh was busy with his light meter; Mr. Kleiber grunted noncommittally, while Amy Lovecraft simply ignored her. Only Cyrus turned and looked at her. "No," he said. "Have you?"

Having never visited France in her life, Mrs. Pollifax found herself

figuratively pinned to a wall and was happy to be rescued by the elephants. "Here they come," she cried.

The elephants emerged from a copse of trees and lumbered toward them, trunks swinging. They crossed the road only twenty feet away from them without so much as a glance at their audience. The baby elephants brought a laugh from Lisa. "They're *darling!*"

Satisfied, they climbed into the Land Rovers and drove on. Gradually the topography began to fold in upon itself, nurturing seams and hollows and small hills. The Land Rover coasted down an incline to a dried-up brook bed surrounded by tangles of thorn bush and twisted roots. It stopped and Julian climbed out. "Here," he called, beckoning, and when they joined him it was to see the imprint of a lion paw in the dust.

The Land Rovers drove ahead in low gear, no one speaking now. Cautiously they rounded a wide curve, slowed as they approached a grassless area beside the road, and—Mrs. Pollifax caught her breath in awe there lay two lions stretched out sleeping in the sun. The Land Rover coasted to a stop only eight feet away from the lions; beside Mrs. Pollifax the guard leaned forward and swung his rifle into horizontal position, his eyes watchful.

"A lioness and a male," whispered Julian.

As the second Land Rover drew up behind them the lioness lifted her magnificent head, yawned and rose to her feet. She stretched, looked them over without interest and sniffed the air. The male stirred and rose to his feet too, massive, nearly nine feet in length, and Mrs. Pollifax held her breath as he stared unblinkingly at them. Remembering her camera just in time, she snapped a picture only a second before the two beautiful tawny creatures slipped away into the grass and vanished.

"Lion," breathed Mrs. Pollifax, and felt that her cup was full to the brim.

At noon they came to Lufupa camp, which was small — for weekend people only, Julian said — and not yet open for the season. The camp occupied a point of land where the Kafue River curved and broadened, smooth as a millpond in the noon sun. They were to lunch here, Julian said, pointing to a picnic table under the acacia trees.

Mrs. Pollifax had now removed three of her layers of clothing and was happy to sit in the shade. It was a tranquil scene: not far away two men were painting chairs a bright blue in the grass, and mattresses were being aired in the sun. Up on the roof of the largest hut an old man was spreading out fresh thatch and tying it down with wire, like shingles. Finding herself next to Mr. Kleiber at the picnic table, she turned to him

with a warm smile. "Do you know much about guns, Mr. Kleiber? I'm wondering if you can tell me what sort of rifle our guard carries."

The man serving them their lunch chose this moment to place in front of Mr. Kleiber a plate of chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy and fresh tomatoes. McIntosh, seated across the table, answered instead. "A 3006, I'd say."

"Oh—you know guns," she said brightly.

"Or possibly a 3004," Kleiber said with his mouth full.

"A 3004," Crispin told them from the end of the table.

Very inconclusive, thought Mrs. Pollifax, and decided there was something far too relaxing about all this fresh air and that an evening campfire might be the better place for tactful interrogations.

After lunch they strolled upriver a short distance, with guards at their front and rear, and watched hippos bathing in the shallows. This especially pleased Cyrus because there had been no ox-peckers on the backs of the hippos they'd seen at Chunga camp.

"Ox-peckers?" echoed Mrs. Pollifax.

"Tick-birds," he explained, and pointed. "Find them on rhinos' backs too. Feed on their ticks and conveniently warn them of danger." His glance moved to John Steeves, who was helping Lisa remove her sweater, and he frowned. "Chap really seems to be zeroing in on Lisa. Very confidently too."

Mrs. Pollifax smiled. "If there's one thing John Steeves has, I'm sure it's confidence."

"Seems a decent enough chap," said Reed. "Just difficult to picture as a son-in-law. I mean—yurts?"

"Oh, I don't think you need worry about that."

"No?" said Reed, looking surprised. "Together all the time."

"There are," said Mrs. Pollifax, "undercurrents."

"I'm overlooking something?"

"You've been watching Steeves and not your daughter. He's with her, but she's not with him, if you follow me. It's a matter of the eyes. Glances."

"You astonish me," said Cyrus, and turning to her he added accusingly, "Matter of fact, you've astonished me ever since we met."

Mrs. Pollifax found herself blushing — really it was very tiresome, she'd not blushed in years — and fielded this statement by turning to Mr. Kleiber, who was looking distinctly bored by the hippos. "Still no crocodiles, Mr. Kleiber?"

He looked startled. "Not yet, no. Dear me, I hope soon, though. What a hot sun, I think I've had enough of walking."

She thought that Mr. Kleiber had begun thawing out a little today; the

pinched look was no longer so pronounced, and occasionally he smiled at something said by the group. He appeared to like McIntosh, whose reticence matched his own, and when something unusual occurred he would look first to McIntosh, rock a little on his heels while he waited to catch his eye, and then deliver himself of a pithy comment in his dry, sarcastic voice. He had begun to tolerate Amy Lovecraft too, no longer looking frost-bitten when she took his arm and asked if he minded her walking with him.

"Crocodiles you will see at Moshe tomorrow," said Julian, overhearing him. "The camp is very open, right on the river, and the crocodiles sun themselves on the banks."

They turned to go back and Mrs. Pollifax fell into step beside Cyrus. Never having walked behind Mr. Kleiber before, she was amused now to see what an odd walk he had: a strut, she thought, with a stutter. He walked with his shoulders rigid, back straight and head high, but his right foot toed in slightly and threw the rhythm just a shade off balance, like one instrument in a band playing a beat behind the others.

"Looks like company up ahead," said Cyrus.

A shiny beige Land Rover was parked next to the safari jeeps, and three men, all black, were talking to the workmen. As they drew nearer, one of them climbed back into the car and the other two could be seen shaking hands and saying goodbye. The man in the car leaned forward and gestured to them to hurry.

Reed said abruptly, "Chap on the left in the green shirt is the man who was asking for you at the hotel. In Lusaka, when I was checking out."

Startled, Mrs. Pollifax said, "Are you sure?"

"Never forget a face. Shall I give him a shout?"

"Oh yes, do," she said, hurrying.

Reed began to shout, and Mrs. Pollifax waved frantically, but the two men gave them only a quick glance and then jumped into the Land Rover and the car sped away. A moment later it had vanished among the trees.

"Had his chance," said Cyrus. "Muffed it."

"But they must have heard you," protested Mrs. Pollifax, "and if they were deaf they would have seen me waving, because they turned and looked."

Approaching the Lufupa workers Cyrus said, "From the city, were they?"

"Oh yes, sir," the elder said, beaming. "They did not know the camp is closed. Three gentlemen from Lusaka."

"Didn't they wonder what we're doing here?"

"Oh yes, missis. I told them you are all from Kafwala camp, on organized safari."

Odd, thought Mrs. Pollifax, frowning, very odd, and could not quite shrug off the sensation that if Cyrus was accurate, then forces were in motion that she did not understand. Turning to him she said stubbornly, "I don't—I really don't—see how on earth you can be so certain it was the same man."

"Could be wrong," he said fairly.

She looked at him quickly. "Are you often wrong?"

"No. Study too many faces in court. Habit of mine."

She nodded. Nevertheless he'd admitted that he could be wrong and she clung to this, because otherwise she was left with the uneasy mystery of a man who wanted to see her in Lusaka and then, catching up with her, jumped into a car to avoid being seen.

Some hours later Mrs. Pollifax, happily showering back at camp, was tempted to break into song again. Life in the bush, she thought, certainly stripped one of inconsequentials: she had been hot and dusty for hours and now the cold water splashing over her heated skin brought a delightful tingly sensation. She had been out-of-doors since dawn, and soon there would be a feast around the campfire for which she already had a ravenous appetite. She wondered when she had felt so free . . . perhaps never . . . and running through her mind like a melody were little vignettes of the road at midday: the hot sun, dust, the orange trunk of a thorn tree as well as another tree they'd seen bearing long torpedo-shaped gray fruit that Julian had called a sausage tree. She had also learned to say thank you in Nyanga—*zikomo kuambeia*—and at Lufupa . . .

But it was better not to think of Lufupa, she reminded herself. The memory of it raised disturbing questions because they set in motion doubts that eventually, no matter how she reasoned them away, returned full circle to Cyrus. It was Cyrus, after all, who had told her that a man had asked for her at the hotel after she had left, and it was Cyrus who insisted now that it was this same man they'd seen at Lufupa camp, but she had only his word for there being such a man at all. What was she to make of it? If Cyrus was Aristotle . . . she shivered at this demonic thought and turned off the water and reached for a towel. But if Cyrus was Aristotle, it didn't make sense his manufacturing a Mr. X who was looking for her, and if he had *not* fabricated this stranger—if there really was such a man . . .

"There you are!" said a man's voice suddenly, and Mrs. Pollifax jumped.

Outside the shower hut Lisa's voice replied. "Hello, John, I was just looking for a sunny spot to dry my hair."

"Where is everyone?"

"Oh—around." Lisa's voice was vague. "Mrs. Pollifax was waiting to take a shower when I came out but she's gone now. Dad and Chanda are over at the kitchen watching the chef start dinner on that funny stove they have here. Mr. Kleiber pricked a finger and Tom is assuring him that he's not going to get a rare African disease. McIntosh is napping and—"

"Enough, enough!" he said with mock despair. "What I really came to ask you is why you've been avoiding me since lunch. It made me wonder. Look here, was it a shock to you when I said I'd been married once, very briefly, years ago?"

"A shock? Good heavens, no, John!"

"What *did* you think?"

Mrs. Pollifax, torn between announcing herself and listening, opted for the latter and continued dressing.

"I thought," Lisa was saying slowly, "if I remember correctly, that I wasn't surprised it lasted only six months. I thought you must be a rather difficult person to be married to."

"A rather difficult—! And here I was hoping—what on earth makes you say that?"

"Well—there's something secret about you, isn't there, John? Something concealed, a little room somewhere marked 'Keep Out'?"

There was a long silence and then Steeves said lightly, "This is rather a setback for me, Lisa, I was hoping to ask you to marry me when the safari ends."

"Me?"

"Did you really think I went about squiring beautiful young girls so attentively every day?"

"No—that is, surely you were just being friendly? John, I'm terribly flattered but let's not talk about this any more. We shouldn't do at all, you know."

"Why wouldn't we 'do at all,' as you put it?"

"Because . . . well, you don't really have room in your life for marriage, do you?"

"I could change, you know," he said. "I don't have to go batting around the world forever."

"Change into what?" she asked, and then, indignantly, "And why should you? You're a beautiful person, John, just as you are. You give a great many people pleasure by doing all the wonderfully dashing things they daydream of doing. It's marvelous."

"And very lonely," he pointed out.

At this moment Mrs. Pollifax decided that it was more than time to announce herself: she dropped her shoe on the cement slab and said, "Oh dear!" and continued dropping things and picking them up again to give Lisa and Steeves time to adjust to her presence. When she walked out of the shower hut John had vanished and Lisa was folding up her chair. She turned and smiled faintly. "I suppose you heard all?"

"It was impossible not to," admitted Mrs. Pollifax. "I waited as long as I could, but it was growing very damp and cold in there. It's nearing sunset time, I think."

"Yes, time for sweaters again. Thank you for — well, rescuing me." She fell into step beside her, absently carrying the chair along with her. "Isn't life strange?" she asked. "I read John's latest book this winter and his photograph occupied the entire back of the bookjacket and I used to look at it — those sad eyes practically stabbing my soul—and I'd say, 'Now there's a man, if only I could meet someone like that.' "

"And now you have," said Mrs. Pollifax, giving her an interested glance, "and you find a room inside of him marked 'Keep Out'?"

"You really did hear everything." Lisa sighed. "I wonder what made me say that. John strikes me — now that I've met him—as a character in a very contemporary novel, the kind that begins and ends in the same way, with the hero staring into his scotch and soda and about to leave another woman behind as he goes off to a new adventure. He seems—caught by something. And terribly sad about it."

"Caught," repeated Mrs. Pollifax musingly. "A strange word to use."

"People do get trapped, I suppose. Inside of images, all kinds of things. But he is a lovely person, isn't he?"

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "A very unusual man, yes, very charming and — as you suspected — very much a loner. But I think you're looking for someone a little cozier, aren't you?"

Lisa burst out laughing. "Cozier?"

"Someone warm and caring and devoted. Less complicated." She reached her door and opened it. "It is sometimes," she said, "very difficult to remain faithful to *oneself*."

"Oh, I do hope you like Dad as much as he likes you," Lisa blurted out, and then stopped, blushing. "Oh dear, I didn't mean—What on earth am I doing carrying this chair with me?" she asked, noticing it for the first time. "I really must change for dinner. Which in this case," she added, laughing, "means removing one sweater and adding another, or changing from jeans to corduroys!"

* * *

The sun had already set when Mrs. Pollifax descended the hill to join the group around the campfire, and the single lantern hanging from the post had been lighted. The flames of the fire held shades of blue in them tonight, and the wood crackled merrily.

"You missed an egret," Cyrus told her with a welcoming smile. "Incredible sight."

"And a family of monkeys scolding us from the trees," put in Tom Henry. "They were certainly cross at finding us here again, this must be their playground."

"A dozen at least," added Lisa.

"God I'm hungry," said Amy Lovecraft. She was wearing still another new outfit tonight, a blue Jacquard turtleneck and dark-blue slacks over which she'd thrown a fleecy red jacket. Mrs. Pollifax wondered how many suitcases she traveled with, and decided it was better not to know.

Julian said, "I've given orders that dinner be served early tonight— before seven because everyone is so hungry."

"Marvelous," said Amy, pronouncing it mav-lus.

"And what time is it now?"

Julian glanced at his watch and frowned. "The men are late, they should have begun setting the table by now. I'd better go up and see what the matter is."

"Yes, do," said Amy. "Frankly we're all starving."

Julian half rose from his chair and then froze and fell back in astonishment. Following his gaze Mrs. Pollifax saw three men move out of the darkness toward the campfire, silently, like phantoms rising out of the mist. At first she didn't understand, thinking them Kafwala workers whom she'd not seen before, and then the firelight picked out the long barrel of a rifle, and as the three black men moved to surround them she felt the first taste of fear in her throat.

Steeves said with a gasp, "I say, who the hell what *is* this?"

They had arrived so silently, their steps muted by the sound of the rapids, that Mrs. Pollifax found it difficult to believe in their reality. It was like opening one's door in July to find Halloweeners on the doorstep. Then Julian, looking grim, said, *"Nguti?"* and she knew these men were real and dangerous.

In excellent English the leader said, "If you move we shoot. We wish only hostages. You," he said, pointing to Mrs. Pollifax. "You walk over here."

"Now wait a minute," said Cyrus, starting to rise from his chair, but one of the men reached out and pushed him down.

"And you," said their spokesman, pointing to Amy Lovecraft.

Mrs. Pollifax stood up, acutely aware of how snug the circle around

the campfire looked. As she reluctantly crossed that circle, about to leave it, she became equally aware of each person she passed: of John Steeves looking furious, of Willem Kleiber shrinking back in his chair as if to make himself invisible, Lisa open-mouthed and plainly frightened, and Tom Henry studying the faces of the men with guns. When she reached the leader and turned, she saw that Cyrus was looking so outraged that she would have smiled if she hadn't felt so much like crying. It was, after all, dinnertime, and she was hungry and cold and she had the distinct feeling that she was not going to be fed.

And then Amy Lovecraft came up behind her and the leader said to his confederate, "Take them—quickly," and turning back he spoke across the fire to Julian. "You will remain very still, please. Your men on the hill have all been locked into the kitchen, your marconi is broken and your Land Rovers put out of action. I will have my gun on you, watching. I warn you, don't try to follow. Don't move."

"You're not Zambians," Julian said curtly, watching him. "How did you get into the park?"

"That's our business."

Whatever else was said, Mrs. Pollifax was not destined to hear because she was being pulled away from the scene by one of the men. He gripped her tightly under one arm and dragged her in among the trees and along the river, then pulled her up a steep hill until she came face to face with a Land Rover waiting in the darkness. A rope was tied around her wrists, binding them together tightly behind her back, and then she was shoved into the rear of the car and a rifle held at her chest. The rifle was lowered for the arrival of Amy Lovecraft, who was pushed in beside Mrs. Pollifax, and then one of the men climbed into the driver's seat and started the engine, the Land Rover backed, turned and waited.

"This is terrifying," whispered Amy Lovecraft. "Isn't there something we can do?"

"With our wrists tied and a rifle pointed at us?" said Mrs. Pollifax dryly, and concentrated on catching her breath after the rush up the hill.

She heard footsteps, a muffled laugh, and the third man swung into the seat behind them. "Let's get out of here—fast," he said. "Turn on the headlights and move it, we can't keep Sikota waiting."

CHAPTER 9

IT WAS ASTONISHING, THOUGHT MRS. POLLIFAX, HOW FURIOUS SHE could feel at Aristotle as they bumped along the road in the darkness. It seemed to her the height of injustice that because of him she had come to Africa and now she was being carried off into the night while he remained back at the campfire safe, warm, unidentified and most outrageous of all looking forward to his dinner. Certainly Carstairs could never have foreseen such an ironic ending to her mission. Her first reaction to being abducted struck her now as tiresomely pious: she'd actually thanked heaven that Chanda had been given a film so that if anything happened to her there would be a record left behind for Carstairs. Her reaction now was much less noble: she felt that she would resent very much anything happening to her, she *thoroughly* resented being lifted out of her safari, and under no circumstances did she feel that a few snapshots were an adequate exchange for a life. She was also hungry.

She turned and looked at Amy Lovecraft in the dim light from the dashboard and noticed that her hands were tied in front instead of behind her, and Mrs. Pollifax resented this very much too. In fact the depth of her indignation surprised her. Her own hands were tied in the back, which made it impossible to lean against the seat or to relax for even a second; it also demanded a great deal of effort from her just to remain on the seat, which was slippery. It was depressing, too, to reflect that of all the people on safari Amy Lovecraft was the last person she would have chosen as companion in such a situation. The woman was incalculable.

Having brought out her grievances and inspected them, Mrs. Pollifax began to feel better. About her abduction and her hunger she could do nothing, but she could at least try to like Mrs. Lovecraft. There had to

be something lovable about her, she thought, and if they were going to be captives together she'd jolly well better find it now. She said in a comforting voice, "They'll come after us, you know, it will be all right."

Amy Lovecraft turned and looked at her. "After us?" she said, her lip curling. "Yes, but when exactly? And what the hell do you mean by 'all right'?"

Well, nothing lovable yet, thought Mrs. Pollifax, and decided to postpone any fresh attempt for the moment. Besides, she had discovered that by wedging herself sideways into the corner she could maintain a precarious balance, which was providential because the Land Rover suddenly turned off the road and plowed through the tall grass. They jolted ahead for several hundred feet and then came to a stop, went into reverse and backed out into the road again.

"I wonder what that was all about," said Mrs. Pollifax.

"I know a few words of Nyanga," said Mrs. Lovecraft, and leaned forward and spoke to the driver. She appeared to know quite a number of words, and the driver to speak Nyanga, because he replied at some length.

"He refuses to say," Mrs. Lovecraft told her, sinking back into her seat. "He doesn't want us to talk either."

"It was probably an attempt to confuse anyone following us," said Mrs. Pollifax sagely. "I hope that at some point he'll tell us why we're hostages."

Amy Lovecraft shrugged. "It's usually money, isn't it?" she said indifferently.

Mrs. Pollifax moved out of her corner and tried bracing herself with both feet against the floor. The road ahead was empty even of guinea fowl tonight, and she could see nothing on either side: there was only the dim light from the dashboard silhouetting the two men in front of her, and beyond this the bright twin beams of light combing the rough road. She and Amy Lovecraft huddled in the rear in darkness, with the third man crouched behind them; at times she could feel him breathing down her neck.

They were heading north, she knew, because they had made the same turn to the right after leaving camp that Julian had made this morning when he took them north to look for lions. She tried to recall her map of Kafue Park and, closing her eyes, remembered that it was shaped roughly like the state of Florida, that it was large and it was long, and that there were police posts at various intervals along its border. Only two roads entered it. The road that ran the length of the park from top to bottom, or south to north, was the road on which they were driving now, this narrow dirt road gutted with elephant holes which, for all its sim-

plicity, remained the supply line that laced together the camps at Kafue Park.

The second road ran from east to west and was the paved Lusaka-Mumbwa highway by which they had entered the park on Monday, with its police stations at either end. Thinking about this, she decided that her abductors were either mad or uncannily shrewd, because they were heading precisely where they shouldn't go. They had Lufupa camp somewhere ahead of them—the camp at which they'd picnicked at noon—and Moshe camp above that, near the top of the park, while behind them they had Kafwala camp and the Lusaka-Mumbwa highway. This left them with only one large tract of land in which to maneuver, and she wondered how they proposed to get out of it. She also began to wonder why they'd chosen to snatch their tourists in a park since there must be tourists in far more accessible places . . . Lusaka for one, or Livingstone. It was all very illogical and baffling.

She opened her eyes to discover that the Land Rover was leaving the road again and stopping. This time one of the men climbed out and walked back through the tall grass, and during the interval he was gone the driver had time to light a cigarette and smoke it. When the man returned, the driver snuffed out his cigarette and started the engine, but this time he didn't slip the gear into reverse, he drove ahead into the bush, leaving the road behind. With this act something unalterably changed. It had been a modest road, thought Mrs. Pollifax wistfully, but it was a road that led back to Kafwala camp or ahead to Lufupa, or even indirectly to the city of Lusaka. Leaving it was like cutting an umbilical cord.

The ground was smoother now, but they drove fast and there were small hills and hollows to unsettle Mrs. Pollifax, so that at one point she ended up on the floor. Somewhere off in the distance a hyena howled, and Mrs. Pollifax longed to join with it and howl too. They drove on and on, it seemed interminable, the men occasionally exchanging sharp grunts or pointing up to the stars. It was a long time before they bumped to a halt, and before the headlights were extinguished Mrs. Pollifax glimpsed the shapes of two abandoned, crumbling huts inside a circle of trees.

The man sitting behind her said sharply, "Set up the radio, Reuben, we're ten minutes late."

"But Simon—"

"Later. Set up the radio—anywhere but fast."

From one of the huts the two men carried out a heavy dark object, set it down on the grass and leaned over it. A candle was lighted, Simon squatted down in front of it, slid up an antenna and began fiddling with

dials. His voice when he spoke was quite clear in the still night. Mrs. Pollifax heard, "Simon to Green-Bird, Simon to Green-Bird . . ."

Simon to Green-Bird suddenly broke off. "Got him," Simon said triumphantly, and then, "All okay here, Green-Bird, couldn't be better. What about your end?" He chuckled, listening. "Perfect. We follow through then as planned? My watch says 9:05 . . . Right. Twenty-one hours from now at Location B. Last contact, Green-bird. Signing off."

He slid the antenna back and nodded with satisfaction. "Smooth as silk, Mainza. You and Reuben take the candle and hide the radio." He paused, glancing around him. "I'll take the hut on the right. Reuben, you guard its door."

Turning back toward the Land Rover, his voice exhilarated, he said, "Out, ladies. Climb out and follow me."

They were led inside, and when a lantern had been lighted its illumination proved beyond any doubt that the men had been here earlier, for besides the radio that had been magically produced, there were sleeping bags in the corner, two boxes and a tarpaulin. The hut was small, perhaps eight feet square, and only three of its walls remained standing. Simon unfurled the tarpaulin and hung it over the fourth wall, which had crumbled away leaving only the wooden framework.

"Who are you?" asked Mrs. Pollifax as the lantern shone on Simon's face.

"It's of no importance," he told her.

"But you're not Zambians?"

He laughed. "No, not Zambians." Unrolling a sleeping bag he tossed it to Amy Lovecraft. "You over there. Sit quietly, I wish to question this lady."

Amy Lovecraft carried the sleeping bag to the corner and sat down, her back against the wall, her bound wrists held out in front of her. She had been silent for a long time, and she remained silent, her eyes watching Simon intently. Perhaps she was weighing the possibilities of using feminine wiles on him, thought Mrs. Pollifax, but this was pure conjecture: at least she was subdued and not hysterical.

Simon carried one of the two boxes to the center of the hut and gestured to her to sit down. She ignored this, saying stiffly, "My wrists hurt. You tied Mrs. Lovecraft's wrists in front of her and I don't see why mine can't be tied that way too."

Simon shot a quick glance at Amy Lovecraft and shrugged. He called, "Reuben?"

"Yes, Simon."

"Come in and guard this woman while I change the ropes on her wrists."

So much for that, thought Mrs. Pollifax, thinking wistfully of a back strangle, a front choke or a forearm slash; nevertheless, she was grateful to have her arms no longer pinned tightly behind her, and the relief to her shoulder muscles was exquisite.

"Now," said Simon. He produced the other wooden box and sat down opposite her, so close that their knees touched.

"Yes, now," said Mrs. Pollifax dryly. "What is it you want of us? What kind of ransom are you asking, and why?"

He brushed this aside indifferently. "The ransom requirements have already been delivered to the television station in Lusaka, madam. They became known at the precise moment we removed you from Kafwala camp. Now all you need do is co-operate. We wish information from you, it is a matter of photographs."

"Photographs," echoed Mrs. Pollifax, suddenly alarmed.

He did not notice her reaction, which was merciful, because a second later he was sliding four glossy six-by-ten-inch photographs from a crisp manila envelope, and Mrs. Pollifax could see at once that they were not hers.

"These," he said, and placing his gun on the floor he handed her the pictures. "You will tell me which of these men is familiar to you."

"Familiar?" she said blankly. "But you must know I can't help you, I arrived in Zambia only Monday. It's ridiculous to think I could identify—"

"You will look at the photographs," he said flatly. "They are large and quite clear. We wish your impressions."

As she picked them up he leaned closer, his eyes on her face, and she thought, *Be careful, something is important here*. Because of this, instead of rifling through them quickly she kept them one on top of the other and approached them warily. The first was a color photograph of a long-faced man with a sweeping handlebar mustache and curly gray hair. Nothing there. The second was of another mustached man, very swashbuckling, with a bold look. She eyed him politely and then turned to the third picture, which was of—of John Sebastian Farrell, she realized in astonishment—*Farrell!*—and with a desperate concentration she forced herself to look into his face without expression before she wrenched her gaze to the last photo, a black-and-white picture of a plumpish hard-faced man.

She said, "They all have mustaches. I'm supposed to know one of them?"

"You *do* know one of them," he said, anger creeping into his cool voice. "You advertised for him in the *Times of Zambia*."

She allowed her surprise to show; it was genuine but not for the rea-

son he supposed. "I advertised for a man named John Sebastian Farrell," she told him. "Is *that* why you abducted me? You've just told us it was for ransom."

He shrugged. "The ransom scarcely matters. You know this Farrell, you can identify him for us, and that is what matters. The ransom is only—what do you call it, the red herring?"

This was rather staggering news. She gasped, "You amaze me," and then, accusingly, "Why was it necessary to kidnap two of us, then? Why Mrs. Lovecraft as well?"

"Two are always better than one," he said with a faint smile. "She will be hostage to *you*."

Over his shoulder Mrs. Pollifax glanced at Mrs. Lovecraft to see how she was taking this news of her expendability, but she appeared to have withdrawn into a world of her own, her brows knit together, her eyes blank. In the dim light of the lantern she looked bloodless, her face the same shade as her pale hair. "I didn't realize Farrell was such an important person," she said, turning back to Simon. "Why?"

"That is *our* business. Which of these four is he?" He leaned forward, his eyes narrowed. "You understand we know one of these men is Mr. Farrell, we *know* this, so you will now tell us which he is."

"But none of them *is* Mr. Farrell," she lied.

He hit her hard across the face with the back of his hand, brutally, without emotion. "I don't think you understood the question."

She looked at him, blood running from her cut lip into her mouth, her anger matching his as their eyes met. She said steadily, "And you are not a very nice person."

"You see that? Good. Now look again at these pictures."

"No," she said, turning away, "because those men are strangers to me."

"Look at them," he shouted, and held the first one in front of her eyes, one hand encircling her neck and forcing her to look. "This one?"

"No," she gasped.

He held out the second. "This?"

She shook her head.

"This one, then?"

"I told you—none of them," she cried, her fury outweighing her terror.

He hit her again, this time so savagely that she fell off the box to the floor. Behind him Mrs. Pollifax heard Amy Lovecraft begin to cough, and impatiently Simon leaned over and pulled her to her feet.

"Listen to me," he said in a hard voice. "To me you are so much carrion. We do not leave this place until the sun rises tomorrow morning

and there will be more of this, much more. I will drag this information from you the hard way or the easy way, but *you will give me what I want.* Think about this, it is your choice."

He stalked out.

There was a long silence, and then in the corner of the hut Mrs. Lovecraft stirred and sighed, her trance ended. She lifted her head and looked at Mrs. Pollifax and she said, "You were absolutely super, you know. I hope I wouldn't have told them what they want, either."

Licking the blood from her broken lip, Mrs. Pollifax said angrily, "It's ridiculous, I really believed we'd been kidnaped for money."

"Yes, but what will you do when this Simon comes back?" she asked, looking at her curiously. "How long do you think you'll be able to trick him?"

Mrs. Pollifax had been wondering why Simon chose such a strange moment to break off his interrogation when a few more blows might have broken her; it was odd, she thought, his giving her this time to convalesce. Now she reluctantly turned her attention to Amy Lovecraft. "Trick him?" she said. If Amy believed that she could identify Farrell then this was a notion that had better be dispelled at once. Mrs. Lovecraft was speaking in a low voice but one of the walls was of canvas, and Simon — yes, Simon had definitely chosen a very curious moment to leave. "Trick him, Mrs. Lovecraft?"

"Oh call me Amy," she said impatiently. "Of course you were tricking him, it's what I would have done too, but you can't keep it up forever. The man is frightening. What are we to do?"

"There's nothing we can do," she said, and sat down and faced her. "None of those men was Mr. Farrell."

"Simon seemed certain of it."

"That's his problem."

"But you must see that we're in this terrible mess together," cried Amy. "It's so unfair. You have something to bargain with, but I — " She lifted her bound hands helplessly, her voice trembling. "I've nothing. I have to depend entirely on you because of this mysterious man they called Farrell. Who is he anyway? And how do you happen to know a man who lives in Zambia?"

"If he *does* live here," pointed out Mrs. Pollifax, and hoping that Simon was listening behind the tarpaulin she said in a clear voice, "Actually he's a man who lived next door to us years ago in New Brunswick, New Jersey. That's in the United States," she added parenthetically. "A very delightful young man except of course he can't be young now, for it must be twenty or twenty-five years since I've seen him. I'll tell you

how nice a person he is," she confided. "He helped my son build a soapbox car when he was twelve years old. He was devoted to Roger."

She saw that Mrs. Lovecraft—Amy—was regarding her with astonishment and she began to expand on this further, developing a touching story of boyhood escapades, of families moving and losing touch, and then, "It was Mr. McGillicuddy," she said, beginning to enjoy herself. "I ran into him on the street in New Brunswick several weeks ago. He'd known the Farrells very well, and he was amazed to learn I was going to Zambia on safari. He said John Sebastian was living here; he knew because they still exchange Christmas cards, and for the past few years he'd sent his in care of Barclay's Bank."

Amy's mouth, which had dropped open, closed with a snap. "And because of this you advertised for him in a newspaper? How could you be such a fool? How could you do such a thing? Just see what it's led to!"

"Well, I certainly didn't expect it to lead to this," pointed out Mrs. Pollifax reasonably. "But what Simon doesn't understand," she added, "is how very difficult it is to identify a man one hasn't seen for years. Perhaps I'd recognize him if he walked into this hut, but from a photograph, after twenty-some years?" She hesitated and then added warmly, "He used to call me the Duchess, you know—quite teasingly, of course—but he was that sort of child, very affectionate with adults, and so aware. Such a nice boy," she concluded, and her nostalgic smile was genuine enough: she was hearing Farrell roar with laughter at her story.

Amy appeared unmoved. She said, "I don't know why you can't trust me. I think you're telling me a lot of nonsense. You were very brave with that terrible man Simon but you're not talking to Simon now. I think you're playing games with me."

Mrs. Pollifax began to wish that Amy were a little more perceptive so that she would understand the situation. She said, "My lip is bleeding and my jaw hurts and I don't feel very much like games, I can assure you."

"But you must know one of those men," said Amy, "and I mind very much your not being frank with me. My God, it's my life too, you know. We ought to talk — make plans — because once you identify this man they'll let us go free, they'll return us to the safari, we'll be out of this nightmare."

Mrs. Pollifax doubted this very much but she thought that to say this would imply a working knowledge of evil that had best be concealed for the moment; it seemed far more sensible to maintain the façade of a woman who had never met with anything more violent than a snub from her garden club president over the identification of a knotweed. She felt it rather naïve of Amy to believe that Simon would return them to the

safari if she identified Farrell. He had said the ransom was only a red herring; how would he explain this if she and Amy were returned to camp? It was more likely that he would simply abandon them in the bush and let them fend for themselves, and even this, she thought, was the happiest alternative; she could think of others far worse. She had not, for herself, detected any signs of altruism in the man. She said crossly, "That's all very well but I can't tell them what I don't know."

She stood up and began to walk restlessly around the hut, Amy's eyes following her, and then she moved to the corner and pushed aside the tarpaulin with her bound hands and looked outside.

The first thing she discovered in the moment before the guard saw her was that Simon was not, after all, glued to the canvas listening to their conversation. She could see this clearly because two lanterns hung suspended from the branch of a tree, creating a circle of light in which Simon and Mainza were siphoning gasoline from a drum into the tank of the Land Rover. Above the lanterns a tarpaulin had been clumsily rigged to conceal the light from above, suggesting that it was search planes that worried them.

But it literally staggered Mrs. Pollifax to realize that Simon had not been eavesdropping on them. When the guard turned and lifted his rifle threateningly she dropped the edge of the tarpaulin and returned to her orange crate, but she remained shaken by this discovery. Why hadn't Simon been listening? He struck her as a very clever young man, and she simply couldn't conceive of his missing such an opportunity. He'd left behind him two frightened women, alone together for the first moment since they'd been snatched from Kafwala camp. He'd made his demands and then he'd hit her and then he'd walked out, leaving behind him the perfect climate for confessional. He must have known that something would have to be said about Farrell, but he'd not even troubled to listen. He was either very sure that he had all the time in the world to extract information from her, or he was not so clever as she'd thought him, or –

"I'm going to get some sleep," she said abruptly. "Simon said we'd be here until dawn, didn't he?"

"Sleep!" cried Mrs. Lovecraft.

"Yes, sleep. I'm really very tired, and not as young as you are," she pointed out, tugging at a sleeping bag. She pressed it flat with her bound hands, sat down and inserted herself into it. "If you wouldn't mind extinguishing that lantern—"

"I *would* mind," snapped Mrs. Lovecraft.

Mrs. Pollifax only nodded and turned her face to the wall away from the light. She stretched one leg and then the other; the ground was very hard and her bones sharp, but she had no intention of sleeping. Outside

she could hear one or two murmurs from the men, and somewhere very far away the haunting cry of an animal. She attempted a gentle snore, moved and then settled down to the business of pretending sleep, surprised at how difficult it was.

What she wanted to think about in particular and think hard was the sobering fact that she had not, after all, been selected for this abduction at random. This needed growing used to, it changed every premise and, above all, her prospects. The kidnaping had been arranged exclusively for her, and because it was due entirely to her advertisement in the *Times of Zambia* on Tuesday morning it must also have been arranged very hastily. But this in turn led her thoughts to Farrell, and to the most pressing question of all: who was Farrell now, and what had he become that he was the object of a policeman's inquiry and the motivation behind this insane abduction?

She tried bringing back into her mind the photograph of him she'd just been shown, but all she could remember of it was her response, the shock like a whiplash that had hit her. It had not been the clearest of pictures, she recalled, but she'd recognized him at once, for what was recognition, after all? Certainly it was not the shape of a nose or mouth or jaw but a matter of essence and of memory that stemmed from an organ far different from the eye. It was instant and it was inexplicable. And now, whatever he was up to, she was going to have to protect him for as long as she could, while she waited for deliverance or an opportunity to escape. It was not a pleasant thought.

She had been feigning sleep for perhaps fifteen minutes when she heard the sound she'd been waiting for. Amy Lovecraft rose from her sleeping bag, blew out the lantern and stood quietly in the middle of the hut, listening, and then she moved noiselessly to Mrs. Pollifax's side and leaned over her. Hearing no change in her breathing, Mrs. Lovecraft tiptoed across the hut, lifted the tarpaulin and walked outside.

There was no outcry.

"She's asleep," Mrs. Lovecraft told the guard in a low voice, and then, "Where's Simon?"

Mrs. Pollifax pushed back her sleeping bag and sat up.

"She's asleep," she heard Amy repeat.

"She's talked? She's told you everything?"

It was Simon speaking, but in so low a voice that Mrs. Pollifax left her sleeping bag and crept across the earth floor to place her ear against the tarpaulin.

". . . some improbable story I don't believe for a minute. How long do we have before we kill her?"

"Until Sikota comes. We meet him at nightfall across the Lusaka

Mumbwa road at an old burial ground. I have compass instructions. That gives us twenty hours and we'll need them if they begin a search. But she could be useful, *Tsa*, like tethering the goat to capture the lion."

Mrs. Lovecraft said impatiently, "We can't linger, you know that. By Saturday I've got to be far away, and so must you. We can't take her with us, she has to be disposed of inside of twenty hours whether she talks or not. I thought by now—"

"This was your idea, *Tsa*."

"Don't be impertinent," she snapped. "If you do your work well she'll talk, I promise you. She's a fool, but she could be a clever fool. Hit her harder, Simon, and then I suggest . . ."

Their voices receded as they walked away and Mrs. Pollifax crept back to her sleeping bag and sat in it shivering. *If you do your work well she'll talk, I promise you* . . . the words hung still in the air. It was not pleasant to realize that her wildest guess had turned into fact: there had been no need for Simon to eavesdrop because Amy Lovecraft had never been a hostage at all, she was only pretending to be one in the hope that Mrs. Pollifax might confide to her what she refused to tell Simon.

She ought to have realized the complicity earlier, she thought, considering this, and perhaps a part of her had, for she had minded *very* much with an astonishing anger -that Mrs. Lovecraft's wrists had been bound together in front of her, giving her so much more comfortable a ride. There had been a curious lack of alarm in her attitude too, and surely her exchange of words with the driver on the road had proven a lengthy one, considering the size of her query. There was Mrs. Lovecraft's persistence in not believing her about the photographs . . . her performance had been convincing but her skepticism had continued for perhaps a shade too long in a situation where they both were victims. More than this, though, there had been a growing awareness in her that Simon had known just whom to abduct at Kafwala camp, which implied that someone on the safari had been involved.

She remembered now the palms rustling at Chunga camp after her interview with Lieutenant Bwanausi, and Mrs. Lovecraft in the office as she passed. There was the radio message that Julian had mentioned her sending too. Not your typical tourist, thought Mrs. Pollifax angrily, a woman who traveled on safari and then casually called in cutthroats from Lusaka for an abduction. Her talents as an actress had been superb too; in retrospect there seemed a downright innocence about Amy's lusting after every man in the party.

But for how long could she hold out against torture, she wondered now, as she objectively examined a situation that was more hopeless than she'd realized. Simon had announced that they would stay in this

hut until dawn, and soon he would come back primed by Amy to hit her harder, and with whatever fresh suggestions Amy had made after they passed beyond hearing. Twenty hours lay ahead of travel, alternated with torture, and at the end of them she was to be killed.

And no one but herself would ever know why. As a bona fide hostage there had always been hope, because many hostages survived, but she saw now that it was going to be Mrs. Lovecraft who survived this particular ordeal. She could even guess at a scenario: after she had been killed tomorrow night there would be Sikota to smuggle Simon, Reuben and Mainza out of the park by some clever means, and then, following a suitable length of time, Amy Lovecraft would stumble out of the bush in a state of hysteria. There would be a few artful scratches and bruises, a terrifying tale of how Mrs. Pollifax had been murdered while attempting to escape. And who would not believe her? Amy would be a heroine.

And for so long as these wrists of hers remained bound, thought Mrs. Pollifax, that scenario was going to proceed very smoothly toward her murder and Amy Lovecraft's elevation to sainthood. She minded this very much, but even more, she realized, she mourned the comfortable illusion that she'd just lost of having a confederate of her own here, however unstable. Until a moment ago she'd believed they were three men against two women. Now there were suddenly four people against one—and she was the one—and it felt lonely.

The tarpaulin opened Mrs. Pollifax could see the dark sky and the stars beyond it and Mrs. Lovecraft tiptoed back to her sleeping bag. She had just settled into it when someone outside gave a startled cry.

Simon called, "Ssh no, leave the lights. Reuben?"

"Here, Simon."

"Be silent. Wait."

The shout did it; Mrs. Pollifax rose from her sleeping bag and went to the tarpaulin, leaving Amy to her own dissembling, which consisted of sharp gasps and, "What's that? What woke me?" Ignoring her Mrs. Pollifax pulled back the flap and looked out. The lanterns were still lighted under the tree, but Simon and Mainza stood rigid now, both staring out into the bush. Following their gaze Mrs. Pollifax saw a large shape moving through the grass toward the camp, too tall to be a lion, too slender to be an elephant. The apparition moved steadily and noisily toward them, a bulky, man-shaped silhouette against the night sky, and then as it drew closer the farthest projection of the light picked out a pair of ragged sneakers, then a pair of bluejeans followed by a sweater and jacket until it reached the face of Cyrus Reed.

She had to be dreaming, thought Mrs. Pollifax.

He came to a stop and stood there, looking big and wondrously normal and not at all ruffled. "Hello," he said amiably, blinking at the sudden brightness. "Saw your lights. Damn tiresome wandering about out there in the bush. Mrs. Pollifax around somewhere, and Mrs. Lovecraft?"

CHAPTER 10

STANDING JUST BEHIND MRS. POLLIFAX, AMY SAID FURIOUSLY, "Oh, the *fool!*" and then she recovered herself and added with less heat, "Now he's a hostage too!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Pollifax dazedly, "but how do you suppose he ever found us?"

Reuben turned and saw them and waved his rifle menacingly. Mrs. Pollifax dropped the tarpaulin and retreated to her orange crate and sat down to wait, her heart beating very fast, her thoughts in a turmoil. Several minutes later the tarpaulin lifted and Cyrus stepped inside the hut with his wrists tied together. He stood in the improvised doorway, blocking it completely, and Mrs. Pollifax thought that she'd never been so glad to see anyone before in her life. His glance took in Amy Lovecraft, lingered a moment without expression on Mrs. Pollifax's torn lip, and then he said in his mild voice, "Damn good to see you."

"Oh Cyrus," she said simply, "how on earth did you get here?"

"More to the point," interjected Amy sharply, "did you come alone?"

"Sorry about that," he told her. "No U. S. Cavalry racing to the rescue but there should be soon. Chanda's gone to get help."

"Chanda?" said Mrs. Lovecraft incredulously.

Cyrus nodded, looking pleased. "Damn clever boy, Chanda, or *ba na mâno*, as he puts it in Bemba. Damn clever at tracking too. We were only half an hour behind you. Slowed us down a bit, that false turn off the road you made, but it took Chanda only a few minutes to look over the signs and guess the trick. Learning a lot on this safari," he said, smiling at Mrs. Pollifax.

"But tell us how you got here," cried Amy, looking as if she wanted to shake him. "You can't have walked, and the Land Rovers—they said the Land Rovers—"

She had almost given herself away there, thought Mrs. Pollifax, watching her.

"Oh, yes, all the tires were slashed," Cyrus told her cheerfully, "but these ruffians who carried you off didn't realize there were spares in the storage hut. Julian took off in a great hurry for Chunga in one of the cars. Wanted to radio the police, he said . . . organize search parties. Seemed a damn shame nobody thought of following you while the trail was hot. *I* thought of it, and Chanda thought of it, so we had a little talk and stole a Land Rover."

"Just like that," said Amy with a hollow laugh. "How –how original! Then you've brought a Land Rover here?"

"Not exactly here," he conceded. "Got mired in a swamp piece of land half a mile away. Thought we'd have to sit there until dawn, the two of us, but then we saw the light here. Chanda gave me escort just to be sure I didn't tangle with any lions—and then took off into the night for Kafwala."

"On foot?"

"On foot," nodded Cyrus, giving her a curious glance. "Something wrong?"

"No, not at all, but what a story," said Mrs. Lovecraft. "Then Chanda will be coming back with help very soon?"

Mrs. Pollifax wanted to cry out, *Don't say any more*, but she sat helpless and irresolute, not wanting Amy to learn that her connivance was known.

"Afraid not soon," confessed Cyrus. "Not *that* many spare tires. Julian's got four on his Land Rover but he's down at Chunga camp now. Other four are on the Land Rover stuck out there in the bush. Only a matter of hours, though."

"How how comforting," said Mrs. Lovecraft, attempting another brittle laugh.

If Amy was laughing, Mrs. Pollifax was struggling against tears. Her emotions had never felt so battered; at sight of Cyrus her spirits had gone skyward, but now they were plummeting as she realized with a sense of horror what his arrival meant for him. She was touched by his courage, appalled by his recklessness and comforted by his reliable and enormous presence. At the same time just to complicate the tangle she wanted to laugh at the comic note he was introducing into the situation. For instance, he was blocking Simon's entrance into the hut now, which became more and more obvious from the rude noises outside. Cyrus turned, looked down, said, "Oh sorry," and Simon emerged from behind him looking very much like an angry puppy riding herd on a Saint Bernard.

Simon said sharply to Mrs. Lovecraft, "Out quickly. I separate you now. Into the other hut."

Mrs. Pollifax had wondered how they would confer about this development, and she thought that Simon managed it very convincingly; in turn, Amy Lovecraft managed to look convincingly frightened as she walked out ahead of him. As soon as the tarpaulin fell in place behind them Mrs. Pollifax whispered, "Be careful what you say, he's really taking Mrs. Lovecraft out to confer with her."

"Confer?" said Cyrus, staring at her in astonishment.

She nodded. "When Amy thought I was asleep she walked out and began talking to them about me. It turns out that she's in charge of the whole thing, except for someone called Sikota in Lusaka."

"Good God," said Cyrus, looking appalled. "And I was about to ask if we ought to worry about her being taken off alone like that. Glad you told me. Damn glad I came."

"Yes, because if Chanda hurries how long do you think it will take him to reach Kafwala on foot?"

Cyrus shook his head. "Too long," he said uneasily. "And they'll know it. Shouldn't have told Amy about Chanda."

"But how could you have not told her when you thought she was a hostage too?" protested Mrs. Pollifax. "And they would have insisted on knowing how you found us, Cyrus. If you'd refused to tell them they would have followed your tracks to the Land Rover."

"Shouldn't have mentioned there being so few spare tires, either," Cyrus said gruffly. "Very bad. Who's this Sikota chap you mentioned?"

"He must be the man who delivered a ransom note to the television station in Lusaka at the same time we were captured. They talked to him by radio," she explained.

"Oh?" said Cyrus, digesting this. "Pity Julian couldn't have known that before he went dashing off to get the news out. Done better, I'm thinking, to have followed you."

"As you did," she said, smiling.

"Yes." He gave her a thoughtful glance. "Suppose you realize these are the same three men we saw at Lufupa camp this noon. Which of them hit you?"

"It doesn't matter, Cyrus."

"Try hitting you again," he said sternly, "and they'll have me to deal with."

She said unsteadily, "You should never, *never* have come after us like this, Cyrus. It was madness."

"Only thing I could think of to impress you, my dear."

"Impress me!"

"Well," he said with a boyish grin, "couldn't believe you'd give me a thought, coping with this bunch of hoodlums. Rather hard to overlook if I'm here. Too big."

She began to laugh, which tore open her cracked lip again and sent a stab of pain across her cheekbone, but it was amazing how much better she felt for it, and almost light-hearted. It fortified her for Simon's reappearance.

He walked in and gave Cyrus a nasty glance. "We do not wait for dawn to leave," he said coldly. "Because of you we go now."

"Afraid of that," sighed Cyrus. "Sorry, my dear."

"It's all right," she said, but of course it wasn't. For just a few brief moments there had been a flicker of hope that Chanda might be able to bring rescue before dawn. And really it was so unfair, she thought helplessly, to see all of her plans to uncover Aristotle aborted like this. By now, back at camp, who knew what arrangements were being made to assassinate some unknown and unknowing victim?

"Mainza " Simon's voice brought her back to the present, and she realized that her worries over Aristotle were a luxury just now. She had to resist distractions; her life and Cyrus' life depended upon it.

"Mainza, remove all but this lantern."

Mainza nodded and began rolling up the sleeping bags. "And while the car is being packed, we begin again," Simon told her, looking grim. "Sit, please, and you -" He pointed at Cyrus. "You will stand in the corner over there where I can observe you."

"Think not," said Reed mildly. "Bigger than you are. Don't plan to budge an inch."

Simon gave him a long, measuring stare. "You prefer that we shoot you instead?"

Cyrus shrugged. "No need to, you know. Only came to keep the ladies company. I'll stand where I am and watch—like a UN observer," he added helpfully.

Perhaps it was Cyrus' size or his mildness or a lingering sense of authority from his years on the bench, but it became obvious now to Mrs. Pollifax that Simon didn't know how to handle him. Cyrus was large, he was amiable and he exuded kindness, but he had an air about him of being immovable. Simon eyed him with resentment and then apparently decided to ignore him because he turned away and gestured Mrs. Pollifax to sit down.

"As I started to say, we begin again." He was forced to step back as Mainza passed him, his arms filled with sleeping bags. When Mainza had gone he sat down on the other box. "Now you will tell me *exactly* how you met this Mr. Farrell."

"Farrell?" said Cyrus, lifting an eyebrow in surprise. "So that's it!"

"Yes, Farrell," Mrs. Pollifax said, nodding, and then, "all right," and began her story again. She explained about the house in New Brunswick, New Jersey, her son Roger and the soapbox car, but this time she embellished the story with small artistic details. She added a soapbox derby in which Roger won a first prize of five dollars, and she gave Farrell a mother who played the piano and a father who owned a department store. "And then the father died," she added, tiring of the story. "That's when they moved away."

Mainza tiptoed in again and then went out with the remaining sleeping bags and a lantern. Simon did not comment on her story. He drew out the four photographs again and held up the lantern for her to examine them by. "Which?" he demanded, handing them to her. "Perhaps it will improve your memory if I tell you that your life depends on it."

Mrs. Pollifax examined them one by one, frowning appropriately while Simon studied her face. She noticed that numbers had suddenly appeared in pencil on the bottom corner of each photograph; Mrs. Lovecraft's idea, no doubt. "I don't recognize any of these men," she said again with finality.

"Mind if I look?" asked Cyrus, and when Simon only shrugged he took the pictures, glanced through them and shook his head. "Absolutely impossible," he said flatly. "None of these men could have lived next door to Mrs. Pollifax."

"I may ask why?" Simon's voice was biting.

"Look at her, look at them. Tough-looking chaps. You think she'd know such a person? None of them," he added with authority, "built a soapbox car in his life."

Smiling at him, Mrs. Pollifax thought, *You dear man, there are so many things you don't know about my friends, but you've become one. Solidly.*

Simon leaned closer to her. "I do not believe you understand me. If you remain stubborn we kill you like that," he told her, snapping his fingers. "We kill this man too."

"Stay as stubborn as she pleases," said Cyrus. "Why this passion for having Mr. Farrell identified?"

"So we will know which of these four men he is," he said, exasperated. "Ah Mainza, the Land Rover is ready?"

"Everything is inside, Simon."

"Then we go. Take them out, Mainza, I'll bring the lantern and tarpaulin. As for you," he told Mrs. Pollifax, "we talk again, but if you do not talk for me, Sikota is the man with a genuis. For him *everyone* talks."

They climbed into the Land Rover. Apparently Amy's role of innocent hostage was to be continued because she was led out of the second hut by Reuben, her wrists still bound, and inserted between Mrs. Pollifax and Cyrus on the rear seat. A rope was threaded through each of their bound wrists and secured to either side of the car, giving them a primitive check against falling; evidently some rugged driving lay ahead.

Amy spoke only once. She turned her flawless profile to Cyrus and said coolly, "It was terribly sweet of you to come, Cyrus, but I hope you'll realize what you've done. Now we're both hostages to Mrs. Pollifax. They'll kill us first to persuade her to talk, and believe it or not this woman seems very willing to sacrifice us. She doesn't give a damn at all."

"Ha," was Cyrus' only response.

The Land Rover started with a jolt, and following this, in proportion to the distance they covered, all sense of time diminished for Mrs. Pollifax. It was not that the Land Rover drove so fast but that a relentless speed of fifteen miles per hour over rough ground abused every bone in the body. The headlights had been taped so that only the immediate ground could be seen, and frequently the Land Rover swerved to avoid a rock, and once a startled wild beast. At some point during the first hour—she supposed it was an hour –Cyrus observed that they were heading west, and then after an interminable length of time he announced that they seemed to be veering south, but except for these comments no one spoke. Mrs. Lovecraft remained silent and Mrs. Pollifax reflected that if Kafue Park was half the size of Switzerland, this gave Simon a great deal of space in which to maneuver, and any search parties vast difficulties in finding them.

It was kinder not to think of Aristotle. She began to think instead of how far she could go in protecting Farrell's life from whatever dangers these people represented, and she thought the dangers must be considerable if they would go to such lengths as an abduction. But there was Cyrus' life too . . . He had wandered after her, heroic and innocent, and it was unthinkable that he might have to pay for it with his life. She felt responsible for him even if he would snort indignantly at such an idea. How could one choose? One could say that Farrell was the younger, with more years ahead of him to live, but balanced against this was the fact that Farrell had survived to his forty-some years by outwitting just such people as Simon, and how could she assume that he wouldn't survive her identifying him? And on that score there rose the doubts—oh God, the doubts, she cried silently, those niggling, poisonous doubts that

were perfectly logical but which she would do well to face now, and with honesty. Chance had brought her and Farrell together once in a very rare intimacy, but there was no overlooking the fact that their values had been different even then, and that four years had intervened since she'd known him. He might be smuggling drugs, or involved in something equally abhorrent to her. She could vividly remember her shock at first meeting him—that hard-bitten face and those mocking eyes . . .

She discovered that she was smiling as she remembered those first reactions of a refugee from the New Brunswick, New Jersey, Garden Club. What a sheltered life she'd led before she met him, and how she must have amused him! It was preposterous to think he could change that much. He was a man who'd not broken under torture, and when he believed he was going to his death his first thoughts had been of her. No, she couldn't betray him, she simply couldn't . . .

She realized that she couldn't betray Farrell and that she absolutely couldn't sacrifice Cyrus. She was going to have to wait and trust to her instincts hour by hour, and in the end—if they weren't found in time by a search party—there might be no choice at all, or very little, because even if she identified Farrell it might not save Cyrus' life. She would simply have to wait, and in the meantime, just because it was night and she was cold and hungry, she mustn't lose hope. In fact, if she could just get these ropes off her wrists, the bush country of Zambia would ring with her shouts of *Ki-ya*.

"Growing light," said Cyrus, lifting his bound wrists and pointing toward the horizon. "Must be nearly four o'clock."

Mrs. Pollifax looked up and for the first time since her capture saw the world around her. The light that he'd pointed out was murky, no more than a subtle diminishing of darkness, but it was enough to define thorn trees and tall grass and the slope of the ground. She felt totally unequipped for this new day, but slowly and softly a warm golden light stole over the earth, dissipating pockets of mist in the hollows, and then abruptly the sun spilled over the horizon, huge and orange, and Mrs. Pollifax's spirits rose with it.

Simon and Mainza began chattering together in the front, and at length called in their own language to Reuben in the back. Mainza pointed to the left, they swerved in that direction, entered a copse of trees and came to a stop.

"We rest," said Simon, turning off the ignition.

They climbed stiffly out of the Land Rover and were led to a cleared area which, mercifully, received the warmth of the sun. Reuben brought them sleeping bags which they spread on the ground, after which bath-

room privileges were extended to them and they took turns going off, with Reuben as guard.

Simon and Mainza remained beside the car. As soon as Amy had gone, leaving her alone with Cyrus, she looked at him and said firmly, "It's absolutely imperative that we get these ropes off our wrists."

"Logical, my dear, yes," he said, nodding, "but for the moment impossible."

"Then, failing that," she said earnestly, "there ought to be some way for us to capture Amy and use her as a shield or hostage."

"Thought had occurred to me," admitted Cyrus, "but not with any solution. Have to add I'm not very good at this sort of thing."

She smiled. "It may surprise you what you can accomplish if your life depends on it."

"Yes, but say, for instance, I approach our friend Amy from the rear," he said, "and fling my bound wrists over her head and hold her as a shield, what then?"

"Then I stand behind you—"

"Two of us hiding behind Amy?" He smiled faintly. "Bit of a stalemate, I'd say."

"Why? They wouldn't dare to shoot us," she protested. "If they did they'd hit Amy."

"Could stand facing each other for days, though," pointed out Cyrus. "Or they'd circle us. Three against two, and they've guns."

Mrs. Pollifax bit her lip. "You have a point there, unfortunately. Oh, if only there were some way to free our *hands!*"

"What then?" he asked, looking at her with amusement.

"Well, you see I'm rather good at karate."

This startled him but there was no overlooking his gleeful appreciation of this. "*Damned* astonishing woman," he said. "Enough to goad me into chewing off your ropes with my bare teeth."

"I wish you could," she said wistfully. "They plan to kill me when we reach the burial ground, you know."

"Burial ground? Nothing," protested Cyrus, "has been said about a burial ground."

"That's what I overheard . . . it's across the Mumbwa-Lusaka highway, which we'll have to cross at some point, apparently, and around darkness they meet Sikota there."

"So," mused Cyrus. "The longer it takes us to reach the burial ground—a macabre meeting place to say the least—the longer we have to exercise cunning, I take it?"

She nodded. "Why is Mainza climbing that tree now?"

He turned to look. "Could be lost. See better from a tree."

"But they have a compass and maps."

"Simon's been poring over both since we sat down," he told her. "Very heavy frown on his face."

"I think it would be lovely if we're lost," she said, watching a scarlet butterfly hover over Amy's sleeping bag, touch down and then twinkle away. "I'd like to see it happen to them, they deserve it."

"Not so sure *we* deserve it," he pointed out. "Very tiring sort of thing, being lost. Makes men like Simon irascible and insecure. Better sleep now, my dear, it may be your only opportunity."

She nodded and lay down, and thinking how pleasant it was to be called *my dear*—and how fortifying Cyrus was—she closed her eyes and then opened them to watch Mainza climb down from his tree. Amy was returning from the bush—she could hear the crackle of dried leaves and the snap of twigs—with Reuben's heavier footsteps behind her. The sun and the warmth of the sleeping bag combined to soothe her aching muscles and help her forget her hunger; she closed her eyes a second time, felt tiredness wash over her in waves and then engulf her, and she slept.

When she opened her eyes the clearing was empty of voices and she saw that Cyrus' sleeping bag was unoccupied. Without moving her body she turned her head and saw Amy burrowed deeply in her sleeping bag with only strands of pale hair in sight. Over near the Land Rover, Simon and Mainza were stretched out asleep in the sun. Reuben sat dozing with his back against a tree, the rifle across his lap, his eyes closed, but of Cyrus there was no sign until a sudden stealthy movement from the Land Rover caught her eye. It was Cyrus, creeping around the back of the vehicle on hands and knees. Mrs. Pollifax glanced at the dozing Reuben and then at Cyrus, and held her breath in horror.

CHAPTER 11

SHE HAD NO IDEA WHAT CYRUS HAD BEEN DOING BEHIND THE LAND Rover but he was in plain view of Reuben: only Reuben's closed eyelids a fragile barrier lay between him and discovery, and Cyrus' stealth was proof that he was up to something. She dared not lift her head lest the movement wake Reuben, who was obviously supposed to be thoroughly awake and guarding them. She lay very still and held her breath. Cyrus was still on his hands and knees, but when he reached the side of the Land Rover he slowly rose to his feet, glanced once at Reuben and then tiptoed soundlessly toward her, testing the ground underfoot at each step. Only when he had dropped to his sleeping bag did she sit up, and as she did so Reuben gave a start, opened his eyes and instinctively reached for his rifle.

"Feeling better?" asked Cyrus without expression. "About four hours' sleep, I think."

"Much better," she said politely.

The others were stirring now too, sitting up, and stretching, yawning, their faces cleared of tension and hostility, so that for a moment they might have been a picnic party waking up from a nap out in the bush. Simon called out something to Reuben, who laughed and replied, and then Mainza and Simon both laughed, completely relaxed. Only when Simon's glance fell on the map and the compass did his frown return. He picked them up and tension was visible again on his face.

Amy Lovecraft sat up and pushed back tangled hair with her tied wrists. "Oh God, how I'd love a bath," she said.

But the only water they were to see this morning was brought to them by Reuben in a canvas bag. They took turns drinking from it, and then he opened his palm and revealed a handful of peanuts. "Ground nuts," he said, dividing them equally among them.

"So that's what they're called here," said Mrs. Pollifax. He had thoughtfully shelled them and she tried to chew each one carefully—there were only eight—because they were both last night's dinner and today's breakfast as well. In fact, if this was Thursday she remembered that it was time for another malaria tablet, but she supposed it was trivial to worry about malaria when she might not even survive the day. Perhaps it was also trivial to worry now about Aristotle . . . Cyrus was conspicuously silent; he looked tired, and she realized he'd probably not slept at all, and again she wondered what he'd been doing crouched behind the Land Rover. She turned her head and glanced at Amy, and not for the first time speculated about her motives in this insane abduction. She wondered if Amy could possibly be Aristotle. Women *were* assassins, and clever at disguise, but Aristotle—Aristotle, she felt, was different. Bishop had described him as a professional and a mercenary, with no ties to any particular country. She simply couldn't imagine him involving himself in an abduction, and then there was the fact that Amy knew these men, and Aristotle always acted alone.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Simon, who shouted, "Up!" and once again they were herded to the Land Rover and loosely roped in place. They set off in the warm morning light, and Mrs. Pollifax noticed they avoided open spaces now, which she thought showed more faith in a search party than she could muster at the moment. Shortly after leaving they skirted another clearing and surprised a herd of zebra standing motionless in the sun. The herd took flight at once, their stripes dancing and blurring as they swept across the plain in a cloud of graceful motion, and then as they reached the edge of the clearing the Land Rover swerved and they came to a stop.

"Flat tire," said Simon.

They climbed out and sat on the ground while Mainza jacked up the Land Rover and removed the tire. The spare was taken from its mounting on the hood and inserted on the rim, the jack was disengaged and the Land Rover lowered until it came to rest on the new tire, which slowly, comically, went flat too.

It was at this moment that Mrs. Pollifax sensibly added two and two together and glanced with interest at Cyrus. He was looking exceptionally sleepy and he refused to look at her. Deep inside of herself she smiled; really, she thought, Cyrus was going to be extremely useful now that he was getting into the swing of things. Simon, Reuben and Mainza were looking incredulous; they began talking accusingly among themselves, examining the two tires and gesticulating. She gathered that both tires had lost their valve caps but that the men found it difficult to understand how this could have caused so much leakage of air. Several

suspicious glances were sent in their direction, but since no one could recall a moment when they were unguarded no one accused them.

"Into the car," Simon said at last, his voice surly.

They climbed inside and bumped along on the naked rim of the wheel for several hundred feet until they hit a half-buried rock that bent the rim. The Land Rover at once acquired an unhealthy list that sent Amy and Mrs. Pollifax into Cyrus' lap, and the car out of control. With a shout of frustration Simon fought the Land Rover to a stop. "We walk," he said furiously.

"Sorry about this," whispered Cyrus as he helped her down from the Land Rover.

She gave him a frankly admiring glance. "You make a lovely fly in the ointment."

"You saw?" When she nodded he grinned. "Damn nuisance, walking, but makes me feel better. Vented my spleen, so to speak."

"Do vent it again," she shrugged over her shoulder as Simon commanded her to be silent and take her place in line.

They began their march with Simon in the lead. The terrain was a mix of flat ground and clusters of thorn trees, a combination not at all unpleasant for walking. What Mrs. Pollifax minded was the silence in which they walked; a little conversation, she thought, would be a happy distraction, but Simon had placed her behind him and she was followed by Mainza; Amy and Cyrus came after him, and Reuben brought up the rear. It was so quiet that she could hear the swish of their trousered legs and the thud of Mainza's rifle as it slapped his hip at each step; occasionally twigs snapped underfoot. As the sun rose higher, however, she became increasingly aware of a hollowness in the pit of her stomach that only food could alleviate, and the sun, which felt no warmer to her skin than a June sun in New Jersey, began to have a curious effect on her; her head felt light, but whether this was from hunger or the sun she didn't know or, at the moment, care. She developed a nagging thirst, and after they had walked for an interminable length of time she suspected that she was also developing a blister on her right heel. The tse-tse flies gathered, and with her hands tied she could only swat at them blindly, but Simon showed no signs of halting for a rest and she found herself lacking even the energy to complain. It seemed simpler to plod dreamily along, her eyes mesmerized by the ground in front of her, her head floating along somewhere behind her, like a balloon on a string.

"Rest," said Simon suddenly, and they sank to the ground under a tree, too tired to speak.

Mainza brought out the canvas bag of water and gave them each a few sips.

"Boiled, I hope," said Cyrus.

Amy sniffed at this remark. "Even boiled water here can cause gastric trouble. If you'd only tell them what they want to know," she snapped at Mrs. Pollifax, turning to face her, "we could be back on safari with the others now, instead of of *this!*"

Mrs. Pollifax, feeling better, snapped back. "Nonsense. I don't believe my telling them *anything* would free us now, because we can identify Simon and Mainza and Reuben, and why should they allow that?"

Amy moved closer and lowered her voice. "I've been trying to make friends with Simon, you may have noticed?"

"No," said Mrs. Pollifax.

"Well, I have, and I think—" She smiled disarmingly and a little ruefully, "I think they might not kill *me*. It's possible I could divert the three men so that you and Cyrus could get away. Not now but later."

Shot while trying to escape, thought Mrs. Pollifax. For just the briefest of moments she looked at Cyrus, who was listening to this, and then she turned to Amy and said in a shocked voice, "Oh, I don't think that would be sensible, do you? I suppose you mean an *escape*. I shouldn't care for that at all, would you, Cyrus?"

"No indeed," he said blandly. "Exhausting. Besides, our hands are tied."

"So are mine," said Amy, "but I might be able to persuade Simon to untie them."

I'll bet you could, thought Mrs. Pollifax. She said earnestly, "Well, it would certainly be lovely to have our hands free—it's so difficult walking with them tied—but as for escape—" She shuddered. "I don't know, the idea fills me with terror." She realized that Cyrus was looking at her with a puzzled frown and she wondered what she'd just said that made him suddenly look so suspicious of her. "But if you could persuade him to free our hands," she added wistfully.

"Yes," said Amy, "but you simply *must* consider getting away if the occasion arises. You have to be more resolute."

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Pollifax.

A moment later Simon announced that it was time to move on, and she learned the reason for Cyrus' peculiar expression. Helping her to her feet he said, "Beginning to wonder if you *do* show slides."

"Slides!" she gasped. "Cyrus, what on earth —!"

"Same voice," he said. "Both times. Been worrying about those slides."

She stared at him in astonishment. "Oh—*slides*," she said, realizing how alarmingly observant he was.

He added in a kind voice, "Try wrapping your bush jacket around

your head. They didn't wear cork hats for nothing here in Africa. Very strong sun." He tugged loose the jacket that was knotted around her waist and she thanked him. Incapable of tying it around her head with her hands bound, she placed it there like a basket with trailing fronds and hurried off to obey Simon's peremptory summons.

They resumed walking, they stopped . . . they walked, they stopped. She was becoming very familiar with the African soil, she thought; it was a vivid rust color, with the coarse-grained texture of an anthill, and although the rainy season had only recently ended it was dry, very dry, providing only a vaguely hospitable surface to the stalks of grass. The earth was in fact kinder to her than to the vegetation, for she rested on it, and when Simon ordered them up again her only anticipation was to sit on it again. It was level enough for walking but it was important to watch out for snakes, and so she walked with her head down, which was tiresome. The tse-tse flies kept biting, and when they stopped for a break the meager sip of water doled out to them was no longer enough, and at each stop Simon examined both compass and map with the same frown teasing his brows. Then it was up again to resume walking, the monotony of it interrupted only twice—once by a herd of impala racing in panic across their path, and once by the sight of a dead buffalo lying on its side under a tree, with only the shell of its carcass untouched.

"Lion kill," said Reuben from the rear.

Sometime after that Mrs. Pollifax became aware that Simon had stopped. She had been stumbling along behind him when she looked up to see that Mainza had left his place in line and was grasping Simon by the arm, pointing behind them.

"Something is following us," Mainza said in a low voice.

"I see nothing. Animal or man?"

Mainza shook his head. "I don't know, it moves when we move, stops when we stop. If I go ahead to that hill, Simon, and circle back—"

"Do that. Be careful. We will rest behind the hill."

The word *rest* was all that mattered to Mrs. Pollifax and she followed Simon eagerly now. Mainza soon disappeared behind the swelling in the earth, and when they came abreast of it Simon led them around it and signaled them to stop. "Sit," he said, "but not on the hill, this is an anthill."

Mrs. Pollifax sank gratefully to the ground and applied herself to resting with enormous concentration. Her shoulder bones, subtly hunched together by the pull of her tied wrists, were acquiring strange aches and pains; her feet hurt and her eyes felt like bruised grapes. This was having an effect on her thought processes that was alarming, and yet she felt incapable of any discipline at all; it was rather like watching

oneself fall asleep in the snow and not caring. There would be no decent rest for her until they reached the burial ground, and she reminded herself that once they reached that destination her longed-for rest could very well become an Eternal Rest, but this reminder met with no response at all. It occurred to her to wonder if she was suffering from sunstroke. She saw Simon and Reuben level their rifles, suddenly tense, but she was only mildly interested when a man trudged unseeingly past them. She was grateful that he was not a lion, but the day held such a surrealistic quality that she found nothing surprising about their encountering a man here. Besides, he looked as if he belonged here and he was certainly not prepossessing. He was a native wearing torn black pants, cut off at the knee, a ragged pair of old sneakers on his feet and a brilliant plaid wool cap on his head that made him look ridiculous. A sweater had been rolled up and tied around his waist by the sleeves, and on his back he carried something wrapped in a bloody newspaper; it had weight to it, and there were a number of flies buzzing around it. The man noticed them only when Simon stepped forward with his rifle, but he looked startled rather than frightened. He gave Simon a radiant, uncertain smile and then his gaze dropped to the rifle and he gaped at it, fascinated. Apparently the rifle was more amazing to him than the sight of five people crouched behind an anthill.

Mainza came up from the rear and pointed his gun at the man, searched his pockets and sniffed at the bloody package.

"Jonesi," the young man said, beaming and pointing to himself. "Jonesi. Good evening."

"Good evening," however, turned out to be the only English that he knew. Mrs. Pollifax gathered that Nyanga was tried on him, as well as a few words of Luvale and Bemba, but these produced only excited nods from him and the words, "Jonesi. Good evening."

"Don't think he has all his wits about him," suggested Cyrus.

Mainza peeled back a corner of the bloody package and said accusingly, "He's been poaching. Simon. He's a poacher, his name is Jonesi, and what do we do with him?"

"I don't like him," Amy said suddenly in a cold flat voice.

Simon shot her a quick glance and without appearing to answer her said to Reuben, "He knows the land, he could help us find the burial ground."

"Ah," said Mrs. Pollifax, coming to life, "you don't know where the burial ground is?"

"Of course we know," snapped Simon, and then spoiled the effect by adding, "It's only that we've never traveled this way before."

"So you're lost?" said Amy sarcastically. "How thoughtful of you to tell us all about it, Simon."

"Don't see how this Jonesi's going to help if you can't even communicate with him," pointed out Cyrus.

But Mainza, having captured the poacher's attention, sat down cross-legged on the ground and began digging in the earth with a stick, forming a series of small mounds. When he had created half a dozen of these he placed a twig on one, a button on another, and a shred of cloth on a third. The poacher squatted beside him, watching doubtfully, until suddenly he nodded and burst out talking, pointing to the south and laughing. After more sign language Jonesi took the stick from Mainza and drew the rough outline of an animal, after which they made more sign language and Mainza stood up. "He knows the burial ground," he told Simon. "He'll take us there if we don't report his poaching. It's antelope meat in his sack."

Mrs. Pollifax thought about this carefully, aware of something there that she'd been too tired to catch. Antelope meat . . . She applied herself to this diligently: antelope meat, burial ground, poaching . . . but of course, she thought dizzily, Jonesi's meat was butchered meat, and if it had been butchered, then it had to have been cut from the carcass with a knife . . . a *knife.*

Her tiredness fell away from her like an old coat that had been ready for the Salvation Army anyway. Hope was all that she'd needed, and now it began flowing through her bloodstream like adrenalin. A knife. With a knife they could assert themselves and get away. A knife would free their hands for all kinds of gloriously hostile purposes.

"You look," said Cyrus as they rose to go, "like someone who's just found the Holy Grail."

She gave him a dazzling smile, and in the brief moment before Simon separated them she whispered, "Cyrus . . . the poacher has to be carrying a *knife.*"

CHAPTER 12

MRS. POLLIFAX REASONED THAT HER FIRST EFFORTS, NOW THAT SHE was aroused, ought to go into establishing some kind of relationship with the poacher. Under the circumstances she felt she could at least extend to him a small but heartfelt welcome, and then slowly hope to impress on him the fact that she and Cyrus were captives. If sign language had succeeded once with him, she could see no reason why it shouldn't succeed again.

She began to walk faster, accelerating her pace until she drew abreast of him. When he turned his head to look at her she smiled at him and won a huge and vacant grin in return. He was certainly the tallest Zambian she'd seen, probably six feet tall if he stood up straight, and so thin that his ribs could be counted under his flesh. His face was long and bony, and, combined with his protruding teeth, his senseless wide grin and that absurd green-and-black plaid wool cap, it gave him the look of a man definitely lacking in intelligence. Nevertheless he was not one of *them*, she had just deduced that he must be carrying a knife, and he was their only hope.

After they had exchanged a number of eager smiles, she felt that she had paved the way for a subtler message. When he turned again to look at her she lifted her tied wrists to his gaze. She did this discreetly. His eyes dropped to her hands, his smile broadened, and then he startled her by throwing back his head and laughing.

This was certainly depressing. The laugh drew a backward glance from Simon, and she had to pretend that she was lifting her wrists to push back her hair. She decided that making a bid for Jonesi's friendship at this point could be dangerous, and she fell back behind him in line.

This left her with her second challenge: where did a man who wore only sneakers, cap and shorts carry a knife? She guessed it would have

to be in one of the pockets of his disreputable shorts until she remembered that Reuben had searched both of Jonesi's pockets and had seemed satisfied that he carried no weapons. If it wasn't in his trousers, she decided, then the knife would have to be concealed either in the rolled-up sweater around his waist or in his cap, and of the two she thought that she would vote for the cap: there was an elemental logic in this because the cap was obviously a prized possession, and the knife would be equally valued. She began to play with possibilities for getting the cap on his head and discovered that this happily removed all thoughts of hunger and thirst from her mind.

In midafternoon they came to the road. Simon signaled them to stop, and once they had straggled to a halt Mrs. Pollifax heard the unmistakable sound of a truck in the distance. It soon passed. Simon waited for them to form a circle around him, rather like a Boy Scout leader preparing to give instructions to his troop. "The road is just ahead," he explained. "We go two by two across it, and very quickly, you understand?" Pointing to Mrs. Pollifax he said, "You will go first, with Reuben and Mainza. Reuben, you will come back for the man, I will follow with the other woman. Listen before you cross, the wind blows from the west."

Mrs. Pollifax was led forward through a screen of trees until they came to the road, a two-lane macadam highway stretching from east to west. It was depressingly empty of traffic now. Reuben grasped one of her arms, and Mainza the other, and they hurried her across and into the shelter of trees on the opposite side. When Reuben went back for the others Mrs. Pollifax sat down, hoping it wasn't on an anthill, and tried not to think how near they must be to the burial ground now. *How long before we kill her? Until Sikota comes, we meet at the burial ground across the Lusaka–Mumbwa road.* It ran through her head like a macabre nursery jingle.

Seeing Reuben escort Cyrus to her through the trees, she thought now what an astonishing person Cyrus was and how comfortable he was just to look at, for nothing about him seemed changed. He might be tired but he remained completely unruffled, with the air of a solid man who knew exactly who and what he was even in the center of Zambia. It struck her suddenly that she would feel very lonely if she never saw him again.

"You look like a judge even here," she told him, smiling.

"Feeling very unjudgelike at the moment," he said, sitting down beside her. "I'd give each of these people six months in solitary. No bail, either. They walk too fast."

"I think," said Mrs. Pollifax in a rush of warmth, "that it's terribly

selfish of me, but I'm awfully glad that you came, Cyrus. You *are* hard to overlook."

"Told you so," he said in a pleased voice.

"It was so—so very gallant," she explained. "Except that—if you should have to pay for it with—"

"No need to be tedious, my dear," he interrupted quietly. "Entirely my own choice, you know, didn't have to come. More to the point," he added lightly, "is the dinner I plan to buy you when we get back to Lusaka. Menu's been occupying me for hours."

She realized in a sudden spasm of perceptiveness that Cyrus was only too aware of how near they were to the burial ground. "I think it has to be in either his sweater or cap," she said in a lowered voice. "The knife, I mean—if he has a knife."

"Mmmm," murmured Cyrus. "Let's hope it gets cold then, and soon." He held up his wrists and scanned his watch. "Nearly four o'clock."

"Oh dear, and dark in two hours?"

"Must have walked about twenty miles. Saw a data bird, by the way. Pity I couldn't have pointed him out to you." He broke off as Simon strode toward them, apparently tireless, with Jonesi loping along beside him and Amy a pace behind.

"On your feet," said Simon, and that was the end of any further conversation.

It was perhaps ten minutes later that Jonesi called out sharply and pointed to the left, jabbering away in his language that no one understood. He appeared to know the terrain now because, once they veered off to the left, they encountered a narrow, hard-beaten path through the grass and soon came upon the ruins of several huts, their scaffolding lying in crazy patterns like jackstraws.

And then quite abruptly they reached the burial ground.

It lay in the sun at the edge of a broad savannah, and if Jonesi had not led them it was difficult to see how it could have been found. It was not large. Perhaps it marked the site of some ancient battle, or it was where chiefs or medicine men of this village were buried, for Mrs. Pollifax counted only twelve low mounds. There had once been the village, and people had lived here and guarded the graves, and then the villages had been moved when the land became a game park, but in the people's minds the burial ground still existed, still mattered, for the stakes at either end of each grave stood erect and undisturbed, and no one had touched the round earthenware pots that had been broken at death and lay scattered between the sticks. She liked that touch, thought Mrs. Pollifax, it seemed so much more personal than flowers. A pot would be something of one's own, used every day of one's life, and what better

symbolism than to end its existence along with the life of the man who had carried it, drunk from it, cooked in it and eaten from it.

Cyrus interrupted her trancelike musings with a nudge. She turned and, following his gaze, saw that Jonesi had sat down and was removing the sweater from around his waist. She watched with Cyrus as the man carefully unrolled the sweater, picked a dried leaf from it, blew on it, smoothed it out and then pulled it over his head and shoulders. There was no knife, which left only his cap as a possibility.

"We wait for Sikota now, he will come within the hour," Simon said, and turning to Mrs. Pollifax, with a triumphant note in his voice, "No one has ever held out against Sikota. He knows many tricks, I promise you." The menace of this unpleasant statement was only slightly undermined when he added, "You are now extended bathroom privileges."

"Please," said Amy, and jumped to her feet and followed Simon in among the trees.

When the two of them were out of sight, Mrs. Pollifax looked down at Jonesi, seated cross-legged on the ground, and then at Cyrus, sitting with his back to the tree. Not far away Mainza and Reuben sat talking earnestly together, their rifles beside them. She thought, *It's now or never for the cap*, and meeting Cyrus' glance she said aloud, "It's now or never."

"Oh?" he said, puzzled.

She walked around Jonesi, and when she was behind him she pretended to stumble. She thrust forward her bound wrists, fell against him and shoved his cap from his head. It dropped to the ground in front of him, and just as she recovered her balance a second object fell with it, making a solid *plunk* as it met the earth.

It was his jackknife, stained with blood.

Both Jonesi and Cyrus reached for the knife at the same time. "Hope you don't mind," Cyrus said courteously, picking it up with one hand, and with the other handing Jonesi his cap. "There's a little matter of ropes, if you'll bear with us for a moment. Emily?"

She sat down next to the poacher and held out her wrists to Cyrus. With his hands bound together it was slow work—"like sawing through a redwood tree with a handsaw," he said grimly—but presently her bonds fell from her wrists and for the first time in twenty-four hours her hands were free. She flexed them with a sense of wonder and then took the knife from Cyrus and went to work.

"Of course they're going to notice our hands when they come out of the woods," murmured Mrs. Pollifax, hacking at his ropes. "We've not much time, you know."

"Jonesi is shielding us beautifully from the other two, but I wish he'd

stop grinning at me," complained Cyrus. "What do you suggest I do, my dear, take on Simon?"

"Oh no," gasped Mrs. Pollifax. "Amy, *please*. Just move her out of the way somehow. Oh dear, they're coming back now. Cyrus—"

"Yes, m'dear?"

"Good luck or goodbye, I don't know which, but "

"Steady there," he said gravely, and climbed to his feet, keeping his wrists together as if they were still bound.

Mrs. Pollifax, too, arose, and stood beside the tree, her heart beating tumultuously.

"Who's next?" asked Amy, walking toward them with Simon close behind her. She came to a stop and smiled up at Cyrus.

Casually Cyrus leaned over and encircled her with his freed hands, turned her around to face Simon and held her in front of him with a vise-like grip. "Well, Simon?" he said.

Simon's eyes dropped to Cyrus' wrists and one hand moved toward his gun. Before he reached it Mrs. Pollifax stepped out from behind the tree and delivered her very best horizontal slash to the side of his throat. A look of utter astonishment passed over Simon's face, he lifted a hand toward his throat and then sank to the ground like a crumpled paper bag.

"Incredible," said Cyrus.

Amy said, "My God, what do you think you're doing?" and then she looked toward Reuben and Mainza, who had seen none of this, and began screaming.

Mrs. Pollifax snatched up Simon's rifle and called to Reuben and Mainza, "Don't touch your guns or we'll shoot!"

The two men gaped at her across the clearing, too surprised to move. Amy stopped screaming. Holding her tightly in front of him, Cyrus slowly advanced across the clearing toward the two men. Mrs. Pollifax followed with the rifle and Jonesi danced along beside her laughing.

"Feel like Jack Armstrong the all-American boy," growled Cyrus halfway across the clearing. "Damned if it isn't working too. Pick up their rifles, my dear."

"Gladly."

Amy, struggling in Cyrus' grasp, cried, "You're fiends, both of you, they could have shot me."

"Oh stop," said Mrs. Pollifax crossly, "you know very well they'd never have shot you, Amy. *I've* known it since last night when you thought I was asleep."

"Oh," gasped Amy. "*Oh!*" and a string of expletives poured out of her, followed by a number of references to barnyard animals which Mrs. Pollifax thought showed a great paucity of imagination on Amy's part.

"Amy's wrists are still tied," said Cyrus, ignoring the stream of obscenity. "Need rope now for Reuben and Mainza, and as soon as possible, I think." Looking beyond them he called out, "Jonesi, be careful with that rifle."

Jonesi had picked up Mainza's gun before Mrs. Pollifax could reach it, and was cradling it lovingly in his arms. Hearing his name spoken, he backed away and sat down on the ground, the rifle across his knees, his face defiant.

"So long as he doesn't accidentally pull the trigger . . ."

"Let him play with it for a few minutes, we can get it later," Mrs. Pollifax told him. "We need that rope most of all."

This problem occupied them for some moments, because there was no alternative but to knot together the sections of rope they'd cut from their own wrists. It was tedious work. When Reuben and Mainza had been rendered inactive Cyrus stepped back and said in a pleased voice, "Very, very good," and then he asked, "Now what, my dear?"

Mrs. Pollifax looked at him in dismay. "Now what?" she faltered. She realized that his question exposed a dilemma that seemed too distant an hour ago to ever become real. She was confronted with the fact that Sikota was still to be anticipated, they were lost in the bush, and the sun was already very low on the horizon and withdrawing light from the savannah. It would soon be dark. "Now what?" she repeated.

"I can answer that for you, madam," said a voice behind them. "You will please drop the guns and lift your hands in the air."

They spun around in astonishment. "*Jonesi?*" gasped Mrs. Pollifax.

"Yes, madam," said Jonesi the poacher in excellent English. "You have been most helpful to me, I thank you." Bringing a small object out of his pocket he put it to his lips and blew. A piercing whistle filled the air, and from the copse of trees several hundred yards away a number of men came running. In the growing dusk it was difficult to count heads but she thought there were six or seven of them, all carrying rifles.

"Police?" gasped Mrs. Pollifax.

"Not police, no madam," said Jonesi, looking amused. "The police are in Lusaka far, far away. You are *our* captives now."

"Oh *no*," protested Mrs. Pollifax. "I thought –I hoped "

"This," said Cyrus, blinking, "is exactly like being swallowed by a shark, who's then swallowed by a whale, who's then swallowed by a my dear, what is the matter?"

"I'm not sure," whispered Mrs. Pollifax, staring at the men who had emerged out of the dusk and were fanning out to encircle them. One in particular among them had caught her eye, a man taller than the others, in khaki shorts, puttees, a thick sweater and a felt cavalry hat that heav-

ily shadowed his face. Something about the way he moved. . . . He strode toward them now with a rifle slung across his shoulder, stopped to give Amy Lovecraft a long hard look, and then continued on to Jonesi.

Deep inside of her Mrs. Pollifax began to smile. The smile surfaced slowly, arriving on her lips at the same moment that the man saw her. He stopped in his tracks, appalled. "My God I'm hallucinating," he said.

"Absolutely not," she told him, tears coming to her eyes.

"But—Duchess?" he said incredulously. "Emily Pollifax from New Brunswick, New Jersey? *Here*?"

He began to laugh. "I don't believe it. Duchess, what in the name of all that's holy are you doing in the middle of Africa with this bunch of cutthroats? Or to put it more bluntly," he said, sweeping her off the ground in an exuberant hug, rifle and all, "what the hell are you up to now, Duchess?"

CHAPTER 13

WHEN FARRELL JOINED THEM SOME MINUTES LATER THEY WERE seated at a campfire, built for them by one of his young men. Farrell sat down, crossed his legs under him, and said, "There—business taken care of." He looked at Cyrus and then he looked at Mrs. Pollifax and he grinned. "Never saw you look better, Duchess, except for the bruise that's rapidly blossoming on your right cheekbone."

"A souvenir from Simon," said Mrs. Pollifax. "Did I hear them call you Mulika?"

"It's a name they've given me." His smile was breathtaking, a flash of white in his tanned face. She'd forgotten how handsome he was. He looked ruddy and healthy, and his mustache was infinitely more dashing than she remembered. "And by the way, Jonesi begs me to apologize to you both. He asks you to remember that you traveled in bad company and if your hands were tied, so were the hands of the other lady."

"Has a point there," admitted Cyrus.

"He found it a damn puzzling situation. Sorry, incidentally, that we've had to postpone dinner—"

"Food?" breathed Mrs. Pollifax.

" but we're expecting Sikota, you know, which is why you've been moved out of harm's way. Now for heaven's sake, Duchess, *talk*. Tell me how in hell you and Cyrus got here, and why."

Mrs. Pollifax obligingly talked. She referred briefly to her arrival in Lusaka and then she concentrated on a description of their last twenty-four hours. When she had finished, Farrell looked stunned.

"I can't believe it," he said. "You just walked into the *Times of Zambia* office and placed an advertisement for me in the personals column?"

"It seemed very logical," she told him. "I couldn't find you."

He shook his head at her. "That directness of yours, Duchess, is going to cost you your life one of these days."

"Nearly did," said Cyrus. "Apparently."

"And you didn't even see the advertisement," lamented Mrs. Pollifax. "I thought just for a moment, you know that you might have come to rescue us! Farrell, what *did* bring you here in the nick of time? And why shouldn't I have advertised for you? And how do you come to be called Mulika?"

He hesitated and then he said flippantly, "Believe it or not, *mulika* means 'shedder of light' in the Nyanga language. Surprise you?" He looked at her and added soberly, "So help me I've tried to shed some, Duchess, because I've fallen in love with this country. You've heard of middle-age passion? Well, mine is directed at Africa in general—uncluttered, still unpolluted -and at Zambia in particular. Actually I came here to farm—"

"*Not* an art gallery," said Mrs. Pollifax, nodding.

"—and I do own two hundred acres in the Southern Province, but I don't see them very often these days because I've been helping train and instruct freedom fighters."

"Freedom fighters!" exclaimed Mrs. Pollifax. "So that's it . . . But surely—" She frowned over this, puzzled. "Surely that's not enough to explain Simon's abnormal interest in you? He and Amy were ready to commit murder to find out what you look like. There must be other men doing this who don't—"

"Don't have a price on their heads?" He grinned. "A pity you see that, Duchess. Yes, of course there's more, because with passion one always gets involved. You see, it's all very exciting to watch Zambia grow and develop, but next door you have Zambabwe—or Rhodesia, as you probably know it—and the people over there straggle across our border, some of them having been handled roughly, to say the least, most of them just out of prison or about to be arrested and sent off to prison, and the contrast isn't very nice. These people want autonomy too, they wither under *apartheid*—God, it's such a waste—and they need to be listened to.

"And so," he went on, his eyes gleaming in the firelight, "I got involved. With my background and my white skin I became something of a spy. You've heard of spies?" he asked, his smile mischievous. "I began traveling back and forth across the border as a fake tourist, oh-ing and ah-ing at Zambabwe's natural wonders, which are considerable, and I helped Jonesi set up a damn good underground escape route. Even lived briefly in Salisbury. Unfortunately it came to be known that a man named Mulika was guiding men out of Rhodesia, and then eventually

that Mulika was a white man, and after that they learned my real name, I knew that. But your advertisement, Duchess, so direct and so naïve —" He shook his head. "It must have caused a number of tidal waves in more than a few small ponds."

"Including the Zambian police," she told him. "I was interviewed by a—oh," she gasped, "*now* I realize what was wrong with that interview. How blind of me! He didn't want to know anything about you at all, only how I came to know that you were in Zambia."

"Who?"

"A Lieutenant Dunduzu Bwanausi," she said.

Farrell burst out laughing. "Dundu? God, you must have alarmed him. I'll bet he thought you were a Rhodesian agent. I'll have to radio him all's well."

"You know him?"

"A very good friend of mine. His brother Qabaniso happens to be half owner and partner in my farm."

Their campfire was small, far removed from the burial ground, and on an incline from which they could watch a larger campfire being built some five hundred yards away. Mrs. Pollifax found her attention distracted now by Jonesi's activities. Amy Lovecraft and her confederates had been placed around the fire, their wrists still bound, and Mrs. Pollifax saw that Jonesi was tying gags across their mouths.

Following her glance Farrell said dryly, "The goats are being tethered to catch the lion, Sikota being the lion. And a rather big one, I suspect, well worth catching."

"Rather hard on Mrs. Lovecraft, isn't it?" asked Cyrus.

"No harder than for Simon and Reuben and Maınza," pointed out Farrell, "but of course you're still laboring under the illusion that she's Amy Lovecraft, aren't you. She's not," he said, his voice hardening.

"Who is she?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"A Rhodesian by the name of Betty Thwaite. She's given us a hell of a time catching up with her, because from what we've been told she certainly didn't come to Zambia to abduct anyone, and the bush country is the last place we thought of looking for her."

"It's Amy you were hunting for, then?"

"Desperately," he said. "Night and day and around the clock for the past six days."

"Why?" asked Cyrus.

"Well, to give you her background, she's the intelligence behind a fanatical right-wing group in Rhodesıa, one of those situations where a group takes a more extreme stance than the government, and then, like the *Herstigte Nasionale Party*, breaks away to form its own party, which

in turn provokes several more spinoffs, and by this time you're deep among the fanatic fringe. That's where you find Betty Thwaite's group, all gung-ho for slaughtering anyone who suggests compromise or reason. Even the Rhodesian Government doesn't claim Betty. All we knew," he said, "was that she'd been smuggled across the border into Zambia last week, either by boat at night across the Zambesi River near Livingstone, or through the swamps into Botswana and then into Zambia. We also knew that she'd left Rhodesia with a forged Kenya passport and a change in name and in hair color, but why she decided to switch horses in midstream and kidnap you, Duchess, I just don't know. It certainly wasn't her purpose in coming here."

"But she did kidnap me!"

"Yes, and that's what baffles me," he said, scowling. "Oh I have to admit there was some sense in her madness, because if you'd given them what they wanted it would have been a real coup for her, and she's a very ambitious woman. The next time I crossed the border into Zambabwe—" He circled his throat with a finger. "Curtains."

Cyrus said, "But she didn't arrive here with that in mind?"

Farrell shook his head. "That's what's so damn puzzling. According to our informant –and he's never been wrong before—she was coming to Zambia for the purpose of assassinating President Kaunda."

"Assassinating?" said Mrs. Pollifax, suddenly alert.

"Good God," said Cyrus. "Why?"

"Why assassinate Kenneth Kaunda? Because KK, as he's affectionately called, is a gentle but insistent force against *apartheid*, Cyrus. He's been making behind-the-scene appeals to both Rhodesia and South Africa for diplomatic talks on compromise, and what's more, they've begun listening to him."

"Assassinate," repeated Mrs. Pollifax, frowning.

He nodded. "You can understand our panic. We had only an old photograph to work with, and time's been against us. We batted zero until we found a waiter at the Livingstone airport restaurant who remembered her, and that's when we learned she was a blonde, after which we linked her with the flight to Ngomo airstrip traveling as a Mrs. A. Lovecraft. She stayed a few nights at Ngomo Lodge and then flew to Lusaka, where we discovered that she arrived just in time to join of all things—a safari party." He shook his head. "But it doesn't make sense," he said. "It simply doesn't make sense, her going off on a *safari*."

"It could," said Mrs. Pollifax softly, trying to control the excitement that had been rising in her. "It could, Farrell. It's possible that Amy Lovecraft came on safari to meet the *real* assassin."

"Meet the—*what?*" said Farrell.

"Because that's why I'm here," she told him, nodding. "I don't know about your Betty Thwaite, but I do know about assassins. It's why *I* joined the safari." She glanced pointedly at Cyrus and then back at Farrell. "I was sent," she added, "by a mutual friend of ours named Carstairs?"

"Good heavens," said Farrell, and now they both turned and looked at Cyrus, who regarded them benignly but lifted one eyebrow, waiting.

Farrell said, "Do you tell him, or shall I?"

"Tell me what? That you didn't," said Cyrus, "live next door to Emily in New Brunswick, New Jersey, or build a soapbox car for her son? Already guessed that, young man. How *did* you two meet?"

Farrell grinned. "Would you believe tied back to back in Mexico, after being doped and carried off by the—"

"Farrell!" she gasped. "You're overdoing this."

"Nonsense," said Farrell. "My dear Reed, if you're so obtuse that you believe this charming but terribly resourceful lady does nothing but raise geraniums, then you're not at all the man for her, and it strikes me from the way you look at her—"

"Farrell!" sputtered Mrs. Pollifax.

Cyrus said in his mild voice, "Certain—uh—arts have become apparent to me. A persuasive bending of truth, shall we say, and then there was the karate—"

"Karate!" It was Farrell's turn to be surprised. "Duchess, you astonish me, you're becoming a pro?"

"Pro what?" asked Cyrus quietly.

"She had this little hobby," Farrell said blithely. "As CIA courier. Sandwiched in between—if I remember correctly—her garden club and hospital activities. That's how I met her, except that three years ago I resigned from the CIA and wrote finis to that chapter. But if you don't mind assimilating this little bombshell later, Cyrus, I want very much to learn about this safari. Enlighten me, please, Duchess. And fast."

She told him all that she knew. "But Carstairs was certain enough of his informant to send me here. I was simply to take pictures of everyone on safari, nothing more, so that every member of the safari could be traced—"

She stopped as Cyrus let out an indiscreet roar of laughter. "Sorry," he said, subsiding into chuckles. "Not really amusing except—those snapshots!"

Mrs. Pollifax gave him a reproachful glance before she added, "Carstairs seemed very sure that Aristotle would be on the safari to meet someone and discuss his next project, and if Amy Lovecraft's been heavily involved in her Rhodesian group all this time I can't see her wander-

ing around the world shooting people. I'm only assuming, of course, but putting our two stories together—"

Farrell said abruptly, "I'm going to break radio silence and call Dundu. I'm stricken by the same assumptions, Duchess, because your story fits into mine like the one missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle." He nodded. "It certainly explains why Betty Thwaite headed for a safari of all things, and if she'd already concluded her business with Aristotle, it also explains why she could go off on a tangent and take on an abduction. She eavesdropped on your interview with Dundu and realized that one of her traveling companions was a woman who actually knew and could identify me. She couldn't resist. The abduction must have been done on impulse, and of course it was terribly unprofessional of her, but she thought she could handle both. Yes, very ambitious woman, Betty Thwaite. But I don't like using the radio, damn it."

"Why?" asked Cyrus.

"Because that's how we discovered and pinpointed *your* party," he said. "We'd left Chunga camp for Kafwala and stopped on the road to radio our whereabouts to headquarters, and that's when we overheard Simon calling Green-Bird in Lusaka. The code name Green-Bird was not unfamiliar to us," he went on, "so while we continued to Kafwala to look for Mrs. Lovecraft, Jonesi set out alone to track you down. Very good at that sort of thing, Jonesi. He wore a homing device in his cap so that we could find him again."

"As a fool, Jonesi was certainly convincing," commented Mrs. Pollifax.

"Oh God yes, he can go anywhere with that act, it's saved his life innumerable times. But Duchess, let's get back to basics: which of those people on safari do you suspect is Aristotle?"

"I've no idea," she said truthfully. "I'd say none of them, except that my first film was stolen from my room at Kafwala camp, which implies that my picture-taking bothered someone a great deal. It had to have been Aristotle who stole the film because Cyrus told me that Amy Lovecraft and Dr. Henry stayed down at the campfire while I was gone. Amy could tell you who Aristotle is, of course."

"I wouldn't bet on that," he said dryly. "So we can assume that Aristotle's still with the safari, and the assassination's already been scheduled?" He shivered. "I'm not sure that Zambia could survive as a country without President Kaunda. He's a damn strong leader and a beloved president. Any leader's a genius who can hold together a country of at least seventy different tribes speaking sixteen major languages and make it all work." He stared into the fire, frowning, and then he looked

up and said sharply, "All right, this is Thursday night. Where's the safari now?"

"Camp Moshe," said Cyrus promptly. "Tomorrow they make their way back to Chunga camp, remain there over Friday night, and then end the safari in Lusaka on Saturday."

Farrell nodded. "Then I've definitely got to get a message to Dundu so the police can put everyone on safari under surveillance until they leave Zambia. Give me their names. It may save time to radio them now." He drew pencil and paper out of his pocket.

"There's Cyrus' daughter, Lisa Reed," began Mrs. Pollifax.

"And Dr. Tom Henry," added Cyrus.

Farrell looked up. "Not the chap from the mission hospital over near the Angolan border?" When Mrs. Pollifax nodded he said, "Small world. Go on."

"John Steeves, travel writer, and a very charming man. Willem Kleiber Dutch I think he said, very prim and hygienic and in heavy construction work, whatever that means. And then there's well, McIntosh."

Farrell stopped writing. "Yes?"

"According to Amy Lovecraft, that's only half his name. She peeked at his passport. Of course anything she said is suspect now, but I can't see any ulterior motive in her saying that unless it was true."

Farrell put down his pencil. "What sort of person is he?"

"Secretive," said Mrs. Pollifax.

Cyrus cleared his throat and said cautiously, "Reserved, in my estimation. Businessman. American."

"But always traveling," added Mrs. Pollifax.

"All right, who else?" asked Farrell.

"Chanda," said Cyrus. "Dr. Henry's protégé, who, I might add, tracked down Emily's abductors for me, and then went back to camp on foot to guide any search parties. Age twelve."

"Yes, and where are those search parties?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"No idea, Duchess. I'm sorry, but it's a damn big park." He gave her a rueful smile. "When you were taken west they undoubtedly went east, and now that you've headed south they're probably combing the north. That's usually the way, isn't it? Okay, we've Lisa Reed, Dr. Tom Henry, John Steeves, Willem Kleiber, the mysterious McIntosh, and young Chanda. Anyone else?"

"Amy Lovecraft, Emily and myself," said Cyrus. "Nine in all."

"Right." Farrell pocketed the memo and rose to his feet. "I'm going to radio Dundu now. Sit tight and I'll send a man over to guard you

while I'm gone because this campfire has to be extinguished in a few minutes."

Mrs. Pollifax looked at him in astonishment. "Guard us? Sit tight? But surely you want me down at the campfire with Amy and the others. Sikota will be expecting to see me there. He'll count heads."

Farrell shook his head. "Too dangerous for you, Duchess."

"Dangerous!" she gasped, standing up. "Farrell, this is an assassination we're trying to stop! Of course I'm going down there."

Farrell sighed. "Look, Duchess," he said patiently, "you're tired, you need a rest. There are only seven of us men, and three are out scouting for Sikota, and anything could happen down there in the next hour."

"Absolutely right," agreed Cyrus. "Sit, Emily."

"I refuse," she told him, and grasping Farrell by the arm she turned him toward the campfire. "Look at them—four mannequins in a store window," she pointed out hotly. "No movement at all, no one talking, eating, smiling or lifting their hands. Sikota isn't a lion, he's a man with a brain that reasons. Those people abducted me and I'm missing, and then he'll wonder why nobody moves, but if Cyrus and I "

"Ha," snorted Cyrus.

"If Cyrus and I sit with them we can talk and—and pass things around, as if we're eating, which heaven only knows I wish we *could* do, having eaten nothing all day."

Farrell turned to Cyrus. "Well, Cyrus? Damn it, I've got to send this radio message."

"Both of you absolutely right," said Cyrus judiciously. "Dangerous place to be down there. Crossfire and all that if he slips past your men." He considered this, sighed and climbed to his feet. "Have to admit Emily's right, too," he added, "and if all this helps—don't happen to have a pistol, do you?"

"Take it with my blessing," said Farrell, unbuckling a holster at his belt and handing over a gun. "Take this, too," he said, reaching into his pocket, and gave him a chocolate bar.

"Food?" gasped Mrs. Pollifax.

"Food," said Cyrus. "You go along and send your message, Farrell, we'll wander along down."

"Yes, but plain or almond?" asked Mrs. Pollifax happily.

Their move to the campfire had its ludicrous aspects; Mrs. Pollifax could see this at once. She sat down on one side of Amy Lovecraft, and Cyrus on the other side, while Amy made loud gurgling protests deep in her throat, and across the fire Simon glared at them both with bloodshot, outraged eyes. From five hundred yards away the campfire had looked

brilliant but now that Mrs. Pollifax sat beside it the fire seemed astonishingly small, and the darkness around it like a black curtain. She felt exposed and horribly vulnerable.

"I believe we're here to supply motion," Cyrus reminded her. "What's the matter—second thoughts, my dear?"

"You won't," she said in a small voice, "say 'I told you so'?"

"Emily," he said with a sigh, "this is no moment to become rational. I've walked twenty miles in the bush today, helped you turn the tables on these villainous creatures, I've been captured by guerillas and am now sitting here a target ripe for any passing gunman, and do you really think—can you have the effrontery to think I would say 'I told you so'?"

"You really are a darling, Cyrus," she said, smiling.

"Thank you. Eat your chocolate."

The moments passed slowly, each one seeming interminable. She and Cyrus passed twigs and pebbles back and forth and made flippant, imaginative conversation with a silent Amy, and then in turn with Simon, Reuben, and Mainza. In fact, as Mrs. Pollifax pointed out, they behaved like idiots, to which Cyrus replied that pantomime had always attracted him and that he enjoyed talking with people who couldn't answer back.

It was twenty minutes later that Mrs. Pollifax became aware of Amy suddenly stiffening beside her. She turned and looked at Mrs. Lovecraft and found her staring off to the left, her eyes opened very wide and filled with alarm. Mrs. Pollifax followed her glance and she too saw something move: a shadow paler than the darkness of the trees. She said in a hushed voice, "Cyrus over there," and fell silent, suddenly afraid, because if this was Sikota then he had slipped past Farrell and Jonesi and the others without being seen. She saw the shadow pause and then start toward them from a new angle . . . the lion approaching the tethered goats, she thought, her throat suddenly dry, and at that moment he seemed exactly like a wild beast stopping to sniff the air for danger. She guessed that he was uneasy and felt a fleeting sense of pity for him, as if he really were a beast being drawn into a trap, and then her pity dissipated as she recalled that this was not a lion but Sikota, for whom everyone talked, which meant he was a man skilled in torture. He was entering now on the farthest reach of the firelight, which began to give his pale shadow some substance. Leaning forward to peer through the dusk, she saw the outlines of a short, grotesquely fat man stuffed into a pale business suit and carrying a long rifle under his arm. She realized in astonishment that he must have arrived by car—he *had* to have come by car in a suit like that, and Jonesi and Farrell had expected him on

foot. Then as he took several new steps toward the fire she lifted her eyes to his face and saw that his skin was a dingy white, with a thin mouth almost drowned in pouches of fat.

He had stopped, his hand caressing the trigger of the rifle, still half in shadow but his pale suit gleaming in the dusky light. *He knows something is wrong*, she thought, feeling her heart beat faster. There was a terrifying intelligence about his stillness, as if he was sending out tentacles to weigh and test the atmosphere. And then, as he hesitated, he did the one thing that nobody had anticipated: he called out sharply in a clear, imperative voice, "Simon?" and then, angrily, *"Simon?"*

And Simon, bound and gagged, could neither turn nor reply.

There was an uncomfortable, suspenseful moment of silence during which a hyena howled in the distance, and then abruptly Jonesi stepped out of the bush off to the right and shouted, "Drop the rifle!" From the opposite side of the clearing Farrell called, "Drop it, Sikota, you're surrounded!"

The man slowly turned toward Jonesi, and then he slowly turned toward Farrell. When he moved his action was sudden, all in one piece, and incredibly fast and graceful for a man of so much flesh. He lifted his rifle to his cheek, peered through the telescopic lens, pointed it at the campfire and pulled the trigger.

"Down!" shouted Cyrus.

Mrs. Pollifax agreed completely with this suggestion and rolled off to one side. Two other shots followed the first, but when she lifted her head she saw that it was not Sikota who had fired them. He lay crumpled on the ground, looking like a very large soft pile of laundry.

"Are you all right, Duchess?" shouted Farrell, and she heard the sound of running feet.

Mrs. Pollifax looked at Cyrus and he looked at her. He said unsteadily, "Well."

"Yes," she said, called to Farrell, "He missed," and stood up, brushing the dust from her clothes.

But Cyrus was shaking his head. "He didn't miss," he told her, pointing.

For a moment she didn't understand, and then she followed the direction of his pointing finger and gasped, "Oh no! Farrell? Jonesi?"

It was Jonesi who reached them first, and it was Jonesi who stepped carefully over Simon's feet and knelt beside Amy Lovecraft. Amy looked as if she'd grown tired of sitting upright and had laid down to sleep, but when Jonesi lifted her head there was a bullet hole in the precise center of her forehead; her eyes were sightless.

"Damn," exploded Farrell, coming up behind them, and he began swearing softly and relentlessly under his breath.

"Incredible shooting," said Cyrus, looking a little sick.

"He had a telescopic lens. He got past us somehow, you know. Damn it both of them dead!"

"He thought she would talk, Mulika."

Cyrus snorted at this. "Couldn't have known our Amy, then."

"Perhaps he didn't," suggested Mrs. Pollifax, and turned away with tears in her eyes. "Sikota's a white man, Farrell, I saw him."

"Let's have a look," he said brusquely, and they followed him back to the crumpled body of Sikota. One of the men had turned him over and was staring down into his face.

"You know him, Patu?"

Patu nodded. "I know him, Mulika. He is the Portuguese who runs the curio shop on Cairo Road. Who would have thought he was a spy? He came in a truck, Mulika. Joshua is in the truck now, he says it has a false floor with space to hide people in it."

"So that's what he planned . . . Not exactly Betty Thwaite's type," Farrell said, staring down at the man, "but politics makes strange bedfellows." He straightened, his face grim. "But we've no time for postmortems. I've talked to Dundu by radio, and as soon as I give him the all-clear he's sending a helicopter for you both." He turned to Mrs. Pollifax and said angrily, "Dundu told me over the radio that President Kaunda's opening a new school in Lusaka on Sunday afternoon, the day after your safari ends. It's his only public appearance until August, and it's been heavily publicized."

"Oh-oh," said Cyrus.

"Yes. And if your Aristotle really exists," he said, his face hardening, "then I can't imagine his returning to Zambia at a later date when he's already here now. Sunday would have to be the day."

"Sunday?" said Mrs. Pollifax in horror. "So soon?"

"It gives us forty-eight hours." He turned to look at Amy's body and sighed. "Cover her with one of the sleeping bags, Patu. In her own way—I scarcely care to admit it –she was a warrior. At least she wasn't a paid mercenary like Sikota and the rest of this unholy group."

"Lieutenant Bwanausi has the list now?" asked Cyrus.

Farrell nodded. "He has the list and he's probably circling now over Kafwala camp waiting to hear from me. Chanda's been of enormous help to them, but unfortunately they didn't make contact with Chanda until this morning, and his information was outdated by then because you'd headed off in this direction. Incidentally, Duchess," he added, and

a faint smile softened the grimness of his face, "Dundu reports they asked a ransom for you of fifty thousand *kwacha*."

"Now that's positively insulting," said Cyrus. "About thirty thousand in American dollars, isn't it?"

"Never mind, I'm alive," said Mrs. Pollifax, wrenching her gaze away from Amy's shrouded figure. Her eyes moved from the dying fire to the sky overhead, and then to the burial ground hidden by darkness, and back to the man at their feet. She said bleakly, "The helicopter will come, then, and whisk us away from all this, but what happens next, Farrell?"

He nodded. "You go back to Lusaka and wait," he told her. "Spend tomorrow and Saturday recovering. Do a little sightseeing and try to forget tonight, because it's been a shock for you both. But I promise you this," he said in a hard voice. "There'll be no assassination, Duchess, and KK will safely open his school on Sunday afternoon. I'll promise you another thing, too," he added. "I'll meet you and Cyrus for lunch at your hotel on Sunday and I'll deliver to you the name and identity of Aristotle."

"Just like that?" said Cyrus.

"Just like that," promised Farrell, and turning to Patu he said, "Get me the radio now, Patu, we have a long night of work ahead."

CHAPTER 14

IT WAS SUNDAY MORNING AND MRS. POLLIFAX STOOD OUTSIDE THE hotel entrance watching Dr. Henry pack his ancient Land Rover. It was already filled to the roof with cartons of medical supplies and bolts of brightly colored cloth, and Cyrus was strapping the last suitcase to the luggage rack. The two days of hedonistic pleasure that Farrell had prescribed for them had never materialized. Much of Friday had been spent at police headquarters making and signing statements, followed by a highly censored interview with a *Times of Zambia* newsman and a great deal of picture-taking. She and Cyrus had briefly shopped for souvenirs yesterday, but it had been impossible to forget what was going on behind the scenes. The safari party's return at midday, escorted by Lieutenant Bwanausi, had been a sufficient reminder, and Cyrus had not been allowed to see Lisa until late afternoon. Nor had she been able to sleep well: her dreams were haunted by fears that Aristotle would kill again and that the assassination, already set in motion, would somehow—in some mysterious way—take place in spite of the police.

Lisa, standing beside Mrs. Pollifax, turned and gave her a radiant smile. "It's all so incredible, isn't it?" she said. "Do you think that as soon as I arrived in Zambia something inside of me *knew*?"

"I think it's wonderful, and just right for you," Mrs. Pollifax told her warmly.

"And to think that it hit us both the same way," Lisa told her in an astonished voice. "And frightened us so much we kept our distance, not trusting it. I know how *I* felt . . . I sat at the campfire that first night talking to John and thinking we were going to have a very pleasant safari flirtation, and then I looked up and saw Tom and I thought—I just thought, *Oh, my God*. Like that."

Listening to her, Mrs. Pollifax could almost forget — but not quite —

that in a few minutes she would be meeting Farrell. She smiled at Chanda, who was playing with her multicolored parasol, opening it and closing it and grinning, except that it was no longer hers because she had given it to Chanda at breakfast. "It's a *bupe*," she'd told him after conferring with Tom on the Bemba word for gift. Now she asked Lisa, "Will you be married here or in Connecticut?"

Lisa laughed. "All I know is that Tom, the scrupulous guy, insists that I first see his hospital and the funny house with a tin roof we'll live in—and then we'll make plans and I'll fly home and tell Dad."

Her father, joining them, looked at his watch and said to Mrs. Pollifax, "Nearly time, my dear. Ten minutes to twelve."

Lisa gave them each a curious glance. "You have a lunch date with that mysterious Mr. Farrell, haven't you. Will you tell us someday—you and Dad what really happened to you out in the bush?"

"I'd tell you now," said Mrs. Pollifax, "except that it's not our story to tell. Not yet, at least." *Not until we've seen Farrell*, she reminded herself, and put this thought aside as Chanda came to say goodbye to her, the glorious multicolored parasol held high over his head.

"Goodbye, Chanda *nunandi*," she told him, gravely shaking his hand. "It's been a very real joy knowing you, and I hope oh dear," she gasped, feeling a spoke of the umbrella become entangled in her hat.

Cyrus began to laugh.

"What is it?"

Cyrus and Tom surrounded her, and the umbrella was carefully disentangled from her hat. Lisa giggled. "It's that red feather," she told her. "It's sticking straight up in the air, all fifteen or twenty inches of it. You look like an Indian chief."

"Very charming Indian chief," Cyrus said, grasping her arm. "No time to mend it, either. Goodbye, Tom . . . Lisa, keep in touch."

"You too," she called after them.

Hurrying through the lobby toward the Coffee Hut, Mrs. Pollifax, aware of a surprising number of glances directed at her, said, "Cyrus, my hat—?"

"Very eye-catching," he told her truthfully. "Sets a new style. There—made it," he said, seating her at a table and taking the chair opposite her. "Nervous?"

"Of course I'm nervous," she told him, placing her sun-goggles and her purse on the table. "I've been nervous ever since Farrell telephoned to say they've arrested Aristotle and he'd tell us about it at twelve."

"Should think you'd feel relieved, not nervous. Satisfied, happy."

"Of course I'm not being *logical*," she conceded, "but I find it so difficult to dislike people. I know they're frequently selfish or opinionated

and egotistical, or dull or contrary and sometimes dishonest, but if one expects nothing from them it's astonishing how fascinating they are, and always full of surprises. You see, I liked everyone on our safari, which makes Farrell's message very worrisome. It means I can expect to be upset soon."

He said accusingly, "Couldn't possibly have liked Amy Lovecraft."

"No, but she—I do feel sorry for her, you know."

"Ha," snorted Cyrus. "Got herself into it. Who was it said 'character is destiny'?"

"But that's just it," Mrs. Pollifax told him eagerly. "Life is so much a matter of paths chosen and paths not taken, and Amy seems unerringly to have chosen all the paths that would lead to her appointment with Sikota the other night. I can't help feeling cosmic undertones, Cyrus. It's like watching *A* lead to *D*, and then to *M*, and eventually to *Z* for all of us."

"*All* of us?"

She nodded. "Yes, because six days ago at this hour Amy was still alive, and although we didn't know it, Farrell was down south looking for her, and you and I were sitting here having lunch together—"

"—and Aristotle, whoever he is, was buckling on his moneybelt?"

"Oh, I don't think so," she said earnestly. "It would be a numbered account in Switzerland, wouldn't it?"

"Whatever you say, my dear," he told her blandly, "since you're so much more accustomed to this sort of thing than I. About that quiet life you said you lead . . . raising geraniums, was it?"

"I said that in *general* I live a very quiet life," she reminded him virtuously. "I do think there's a difference between living a quiet life and in *general* living a quiet life."

"Splitting hairs, my dear."

"Well, but—yes, I am," she admitted, giving him a dazzling smile. "And you noticed, didn't you."

"Sorry to keep you waiting," Farrell interrupted, pulling up a chair and joining them. "I'm afraid I can't stop for lunch with you, either, damn it, because I've got to head south and meet Jonesi in—" He stopped in midsentence, staring at Mrs. Pollifax. "Good God, Duchess, your hat?"

"Never mind the hat," she pleaded. "Who is Aristotle?"

"John Steeves."

"*Steeves?* Good heavens," said Cyrus.

"Now I really do feel upset," murmured Mrs. Pollifax. "I'm glad Lisa isn't hearing this. Farrell, are the police sure? Has he confessed?"

"I don't think you can expect a confession only hours after an arrest,"

Farrell told her, and with a glance at the hovering waiter, "Later, if you don't mind, we're not ordering yet . . . No, Steeves hasn't confessed, in fact he's refused even to give his home address or next of kin. The man's being completely unco-operative, which seems almost as incriminating as the parts of a gun and a silencer that were found in his luggage apparently smuggled past Customs somehow —and the fact that, according to his passport, he was in France on the day that Messague was assassinated."

He hesitated, and Mrs. Pollifax said, "There's more?"

He nodded. "A notebook with scribblings in a code we've not been able to puzzle out yet, but on the last page—sorry, Duchess a list of four names with dates: *Messague*, September fifth, which happens to be the day he was assassinated, *Malaga*, October thirtieth, and the names Hastings and O'Connell, which mean nothing to us at the moment but are being checked out. We think the last two were assassinations, too."

"Unbelievable," said Cyrus.

Farrell shrugged. "Perhaps, but would you have believed Amy Lovecraft was a Rhodesian named Betty Thwaite, or that the Duchess here was snapping pictures hoping to record an assassin's face?"

"Steeves," repeated Mrs. Pollifax, trying to assimilate this. *A room with a door marked Keep Out*, and Lisa saying, *He seems caught somehow—and terribly sad about it.* "Farrell, he had to have been blackmailed into it," she said. "There's no other explanation. Have you met him?"

Farrell looked amused. "Those sad spaniel eyes of his, you mean? I'm told women always want to mother a man who looks as if he's suffered, and perhaps he has, but I'd have to cast my vote for a troubled mind. Yes, I've met him."

"I wonder why he doesn't defend himself," she said, frowning, "although I suppose if he's Aristotle there's not much he can say. He's in prison?"

"Definitely in prison, yes, or President Kaunda wouldn't be dedicating the Moses Msonthi School at one o'clock today. Duchess, you've too soft a heart, it's time you retired too."

"It's just that he seemed genuinely fond of Lisa," she pointed out, "and it's so difficult to imagine any assassin being attracted to a woman and looking as if he cared."

"Someone," said Cyrus, "undoubtedly made the same remark about Jack the Ripper, my dear."

"Yes, but—all right," she conceded. "I'm sorry, it's probably the shock. What will happen to him now, Farrell?"

"For the moment, not a great deal," he said. "The man's safely tucked

away, which is the main thing, booked for illegal possession of a weapon, and for smuggling that weapon into the country. It was all very discreetly handled after the safari ended, and now they've gained time to collect further evidence. Your McIntosh, by the way, turns out to be McIntosh Magruder — I thought that might interest you."

"The billionaire recluse?" said Mrs. Pollifax, startled.

"*Multi*billionaire recluse."

"Thought he never came out of seclusion," said Cyrus.

"Apparently even the Magruders of this world listen to their doctor. Magruder had been ill and his doctor advised some travel and a change of scenery. That's who McIntosh is, while Willem Kleiber jets around the world selling earthmoving machinery to developing countries."

"Very appropriate for a man who is anything but earthshaking," commented Cyrus.

"Yes. Prim little man, isn't he? Duchess, have you been in touch with Carstairs since you came out of the bush?"

She shook her head. "It costs twelve dollars to call the United States for three minutes," she told him. "I asked. So I thought I'd wait until I could present him with Aristotle's identity, which I *think*," she added, "he'd find well worth a twelve-dollar call."

"Frugal to the end," said Farrell, "except for those hats of yours. Duchess, what happened?" He stared fascinated at the feather that shot into the air like an antenna.

"Sorry you mentioned it," Cyrus said in his mild voice. "Been trying not to notice it myself."

"I had a small accident with a parasol," she explained with dignity, "and I will presently find a safety pin and tie the feather down, since it's the only real hat I brought. Farrell, do you think Carstairs will have heard about our abduction?"

He smiled. "Don't sound so wistful, Duchess, I doubt it. You were in and out of the bush too fast to reach the American papers. Front-page news here, though. I can't help noticing how the waiters are staring at you. Unless, of course, it's the hat." He glanced at his watch and sighed. "Duchess, I loathe goodbyes, but there's this long drive ahead of me —"

"I know," she said, nodding. "We've scarcely had time to talk, but I can't complain when you and Jonesi saved our lives."

"I owed you that, you know. It makes us even," he told her with his quick smile. "Duchess, you'll have to come back to Zambia soon. With Cyrus, perhaps, to visit Lisa? Only, for heaven's sake don't advertise for me in the newspaper next time, Duchess, or it'll cost me my head. You can always reach me in care of Qabaniso Bwanausi at our farm. I've written down the address for you." He opened her purse and slipped a

piece of paper inside, and then he pushed back his chair and stood up. "Goodbye, Cyrus, I certainly like your style . . . As for you, Duchess, one of these days—oh to hell with it, I'll just give you a quick kiss, a God bless and go."

He leaned over and hugged her, and with a nod and a wave to Cyrus he walked away.

"Oh Farrell!" called Mrs. Pollifax after him.

He turned. "Yes?"

"I was to ask you very formally and very officially if you'd like to return to your old job. Carstairs misses you."

He grinned. "I'll take care of that myself, Duchess. Same cable address?"

"Same cable address."

He waved and walked out, and Cyrus said, "Damn decent chap, your Farrell, even if he doesn't know a soapbox derby from a horse race."

"Yes," she said, blowing her nose, and then she gave him a distracted smile and said, "Cyrus, would you mind terribly if we don't have lunch now? I think I've lost my appetite."

"I don't wonder," he said, helping her up from her chair. "A walk should do us both good."

"Thank you. I can't say that I even arrived with an appetite," she told him as they walked out of the restaurant into the lobby of the hotel. "The suspense made me edgy all morning, and now I simply can't eat when John Steeves—when he—and then Farrell going, too—"

"Perfectly understandable," he said.

He steered her through a crowd of people waiting for the elevator and came to a stop as the door of a descending elevator slid open and discharged a fresh crowd of people into the lobby. They stood patiently while the two groups exchanged places, the one swarming into the elevator, the other pushing their way through. Once in motion again, she and Cyrus fell into step behind a tall man in a turban who was hurrying toward the hotel exit. Just to one side of him walked a shorter man whose erect posture caught Mrs. Pollifax's eye next, and she transferred her gaze to him. There was something very familiar about that walk, she decided, and then she thought, *Of course—a strut with a stutter.* She said to Cyrus, smiling, "That's Mr. Kleiber ahead of us, Cyrus, let's catch up with him and ask—"

She stiffened as the man glanced off to the right and she saw his face. It wasn't Mr. Kleiber, it was a black man wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, and so it couldn't be Mr. Kleiber, and yet—and yet it *was* Mr. Kleiber, she realized in astonishment, recognizing his nose and forehead, except that it was a Willem Kleiber without a goatee and changed,

somehow, into a Zambian. She saw him walk through the glass doors and signal to a taxi and she gasped, "Cyrus, it *is* Kleiber—run!" and breaking free she raced after him.

"Taxi!" she cried as Mr. Kleiber drove away. A second taxi slid up to her, she fumbled with the door, jumped inside and gasped, "Please—follow the car that just pulled away. Hurry!"

The taxi shot ahead just as Cyrus reached the curb. Through the open window Mrs. Pollifax shouted to him, "Call Dundu—call someone! Help!"

CHAPTER 15

CYRUS, SUDDENLY BEREFT OF HIS LUNCH PARTNER, STARED AFTER the vanishing taxi in horror. One moment Mrs. Pollifax had been with him, and the next not. He'd distinctly heard her say, "Cyrus, that's Mr. Kleiber ahead of us," and then the man had turned his head and revealed a gleaming black Zambian face, and obviously the man wasn't Kleiber at all. But Emily had gasped, "It *is* Kleiber—run," and had left his side with the speed of a gazelle and now she was gone, heaven only knew where, shouting something about Dundu and help.

He walked back into the lobby and sat down, mourning the slowness of his reflexes and reminding himself that six days with Emily Pollifax should have proven to him that he had to be on his toes every minute. No slides, he thought, grateful for this, but instead a woman who gave sudden shouts and vanished. He wished fervently that he'd reached the taxi in time to go with her.

Again he wondered why she'd jumped into that taxi, because there had to be a reason for it. What *would* Kleiber be doing wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, a charcoal pin-striped suit and a black skin? He supposed that some sort of dye could be injected into the veins, or perhaps there were pills for that sort of thing, but the idea was insane. Still, Emily had believed it was Kleiber. Possibly she was overwrought after hearing the news about Steeves, but Emily, he decided, wouldn't be overwrought. If nearly being killed by Amy and Simon hadn't done the trick, he really didn't suppose anything could. And of course she knew now that Steeves was Aristotle, so why—?

He sat considering this until he felt a chill run down his spine, and then race up again, and when it hit the base of his skull he rose and walked over to the desk. "Look here," he said, "I want to put in a call to the police."

"Something wrong, sir?"

"Don't know but I want to call the police."

"This way, sir." The desk clerk led him into a private office and pointed to a telephone on the desk. "There you are, sir. Ring the operator and she'll connect you."

A moment later Cyrus was struggling to pronounce a name which he'd never seen spelled, and had only heard in passing. "A Lieutenant Dundu Bonozzi," he said. "Have to speak to him right away."

"Sorry sir, he's not here," said the man at the other end of the line.

"Could be a matter of life and death," Cyrus told him, feeling damnably awkward at saying such a thing. "Any way of contacting him?"

"He's at the Moses Msonthi School guard detail, sir. You can leave a message and we'll try to get it to him if he phones in."

"Yes," said Cyrus, feeling this was reasonable and at the same time trying to think of a way to express his unease. "All right, let's try this one. Ready?"

"Ready, sir."

"Here we are: 'Are you certain you have the right Aristotle? Kleiber left hotel as black man, Mrs. Pollifax in pursuit."

"A very odd message, sir."

"Indeed it is," said Cyrus uncomfortably. "Look here, anybody else there I can speak to?" But even as he said this he realized how entangled he could become in trying to explain a European in blackface to a stranger; Dundu was the only person who would understand. "Never mind," he said, "what's the name of that school again?"

"The Moses Msonthi School, sir. Manchichi Road."

"Right. I'll look for him there."

He hurried out to the entrance to find that, perversely, there were no taxis now. He paced and fumed, considered the state of his blood pressure and consulted his watch: it was 12:40 and Farrell had said the dedication ceremonies began at one o'clock . . . When a taxi finally arrived it was 12:45 and he was too grateful to express his sense of aggrievement. He climbed in and directed the driver to the school.

"Oh yes, sir, yes, sir," the driver said with a big smile. "Our president opens the school today. Very nice, very beautiful school for girls."

"Yes . . . well, see if you can get me there fast," he told him, and tried to think of what he'd do when he reached the school. There'd be crowds, he supposed; a big event opening a new school, probably speeches, perhaps not, but certainly crowds. He hadn't the slightest idea how he'd find Dundu, or whether Emily would turn up there too. Perhaps by now she'd discovered the man was a bona fide Zambian, except that if it

really was Kleiber . . . Better not think about that, he decided, and practiced taking deep breaths to remain calm. The streets were relatively empty of traffic since it was Sunday and the shops were closed, but as they neared Manchichi Road the traffic increased. Cyrus paid off the driver a block away from the school and set out to find Dundu Bwanausi, not even certain that he'd mastered the man's name yet.

Mrs. Pollifax sat on the edge of her seat watching the taxi ahead and contributing frequent comments to spur the driver on. "He's wanted by the police," she confided, feeling that some explanation was becoming necessary and hoping that what she said was true but hoping at the same time that it wasn't. "Not too close, driver, we mustn't be noticed. Have you any idea where they're heading?"

"We are very near Manchichi Road, madam, perhaps he goes to watch our President dedicate a school."

Oh God, she thought, and said aloud, "Do you mean the Moses Msonthi School?"

"Yes, madam. This is Manchichi Road we turn into now, and the taxi ahead is going to the school, see? It stops now."

She began fumbling in her purse for money. "I'll get out now, I hope this is enough," she said, thrusting *kwacha* notes on him, and as he drew up to the curb she added, "But will you do something important for me, driver? Will you call the police and tell them — tell them Aristotle is at the Msonthi School? *Aristotle*."

"Aristotle. Yes, madam." He gave her a curious glance.

She climbed out and gave him a long, earnest, look. "I'm depending on you, I'm depending *desperately* on you."

"Yes, madam."

Up ahead she saw Mr. Kleiber strolling around the edge of the crowd looking for a place to enter it. She hurried toward him, mentally rehearsing what possible karate blow might fell him before he could shoot President Kaunda, because of course that had to be the only reason he was here in his masquerade, which meant that her instincts about John Steeves had proven sound after all, except that Steeves was now in prison and here was Aristotle still free, and no one knew . . .

It was frightening.

The sun was glittering, and shone on women in colorful blouses and skirts with babies slung over their shoulders, on barefooted children and men in overalls and in solemn Sunday best. A very neat avenue had been left clear for the President, she noticed. She saw Kleiber examine it and then, before she could reach him, he slipped into the crowd and vanished from sight.

* * *

Lieutenant Bwanausi was idling near a police car at the southern corner of the crowd, waiting to see his President, whose photograph hung on every wall of his small home. One of his friends passed and called out a greeting, and then came over and shook hands with him, asking how things went with him. Dundu thought back on his week's work, recalled how close an assassin had come to threatening the life of his President, and said that life went very well for him indeed. His friend strolled on, and hearing the crackle of static from the car radio behind him, Dundu reached for the microphone. "Bwanausi here."

At first he didn't understand what Soko was saying. "How is this, your speaking the name Aristotle, Soko," he said. "Two messages?"

First, it seemed, there had been the message from a man at the Hotel Intercontinental, which Soko now read to him. "But Dundu," he protested, "I thought the man was drunk. Now a second call has come in from a taxi driver. He says he and a woman chased a taxi to Manchichi Road, and this woman pleaded with him to call us and say that Aristotle is at the school."

Dundu felt a spasm of fear. Was this possible? Could John Steeves not be Aristotle after all? Yet how could this be, given the evidence? "Man, this is bad news," he told Soko. "Is it too late to reach KK's party? Aristotle is the code name of the assassin we thought we jailed last night."

There was a stunned silence. "Oh God," said Soko. "I'll try, Dundu, I'll try."

"Do that, send out a " He stopped as he heard the sirens. "Too late, the President's here, Soko." He dropped the microphone and began running . . .

Mrs. Pollifax pushed her way through the crowd trying to find Mr. Kleiber, but now in her panic everybody had begun to look like Mr. Kleiber and she couldn't distinguish one face from the next. She stopped and forced herself to be calm, and instead of elbowing her way deeper into the crowd she turned and pushed her way toward the avenue down which the President would walk. Reaching the front row, she thanked a man who had let her pass and leaned out to look down the avenue. One glance was enough: she saw the President climbing out of a limousine and shaking hands with a number of people grouped around the car. She turned her head and looked to her left and saw Kleiber standing in line only twenty feet away from her, one hand in his pocket, a faint smile on his lips, his face remote, almost dreaming. Mrs. Pollifax turned and began to struggle toward him.

* * *

Cyrus had given up trying to find Lieutenant Bwanausi. He had withdrawn to a playground behind the crowd and had climbed to the top of a convenient jungle gym, from which he could sit and keep an eye out for a familiar face. He held little hope of finding one now, and if he didn't he wondered if Emily would expect him to throw himself across the President's path. Probably, he thought, and hearing a sudden ripple of cheers from off to his right, he realized that it was one o'clock and that President Kaunda must have arrived and that he'd better do something. Before climbing down he took one last look at the knots and clusters of people on the fringe of the crowd, framed against the wall of heads beyond, and then he realized that for several minutes he'd been absently watching something — a red stick or a pennant — move determinedly from a point on his right toward an unknown point on his left. Staring at it intently now, his eyes narrowing, it stirred his memory.

Emily's feather, he thought in astonishment, and taking a quick fix on it he climbed down from his jungle gym and hurried to the edge of the crowd, entered it at some distance ahead of where he judged Emily to be, and alternately pushed and shoved his way inward. He was in luck: the first time he stopped to look for the feather he spotted it some twenty feet away. Assuming that Emily was under it, he moved forward to intercept her, and at that moment the crowd shifted and he saw her. He also saw, not far away from her, the back of a man wearing a charcoal pin-striped suit: Kleiber.

Emily had seen Kleiber too. She crept forward, the feather at a ridiculous slant now, and when she moved in beside the man, Cyrus, thrusting aside several small children to reach her, guessed what she was planning to do. She had just lifted her right hand when Kleiber turned his head and looked at her. Cyrus saw them exchange a long glance, and then he saw the gun in Kleiber's hand and he caught his breath, appalled. Slowly Kleiber lifted the gun and pointed it at Mrs. Pollifax, who froze, staring at him in astonishment.

Cyrus gasped, "*Not* karate, Emily — judo now." Memories of long-ago gymnasium classes came back to him, of a dreary evening spent in throwing and being thrown to the mat, and with only a fleeting thought to brittle bones, Cyrus hurled himself across the twelve feet of space that separated them. His shoulders met solid flesh, there was a crunch of bone meeting bone, several sharp cries, and he and Emily Pollifax, Willem Kleiber and two small boys fell to the ground together.

Only Dundu Bwanausi, racing to them from the opposite side, knew that five people had not been accidentally pushed to the ground by the crowd. He leaned over Kleiber with a grim face, pocketed the man's gun

and snapped handcuffs on his wrists. He picked up the two crying children and dusted them off. He gave Cyrus a hand, and then he helped Mrs. Pollifax to her feet and carefully restored her hat to her. Only when he looked into her face did his expression change. He said softly, fervently, "Oh madam, *zikomo—zikomo kuambeia*, ten thousand times *zikomo . . .*"

But Cyrus, too, had something to say. "Damn it, Emily," he complained, "only way to keep an eye on you is marry you. Think we could find a quiet corner and talk about that?"

CHAPTER 16

IN LANGLEY, VIRGINIA, IT WAS MONDAY MORNING AND CARSTAIRS, returning from an early conference Upstairs, was scowling.

"Something wrong?" asked Bishop, looking at him curiously. "Or wronger than usual?"

Carstairs poured himself a cup of coffee before answering. "Not really," he said, "except that my ego's suffered a small blow."

"Oh?"

Carstairs made a face. "You know I've never enjoyed being outmaneuvered by the British . . . Upstairs asked for a review of the Aristotle file this morning, and damned if Liaison didn't report that British Intelligence has a man on Aristotle's trail too."

Bishop began to understand. He said with a grin, "You mean one of Emily's safari companions was an MI agent?"

Carstairs nodded. "Some travel writer or other. Seems a damned waste of talent."

Bishop chuckled. "Think he was taking snapshots too?" He had a sudden vivid picture of Mrs. Pollifax and a British agent swarming over the safari with their cameras.

"It's no longer important," Carstairs said, shrugging. "The safari ended Saturday and we'll soon have Mrs. Pollifax's photographs, and we can pool the results with London and Interpol. The pictures are what matter, although I'm certainly hoping she'll bring us Farrell as a dividend. I wonder if they've had their reunion yet . . ."

"As a matter of fact they have, sir."

Carstairs put down his cup of coffee and stared. "You've heard from her?"

"No," said Bishop, "but this cable arrived from Zambia while you

were in conference. It's from John Sebastian himself, no less, datelined 2 P.M. yesterday Zambian time."

Carstairs brightened. "Marvelous! Is he coming back to us?"

"No," said Bishop, and read aloud:

SORRY CHAPS BOOKED SOLID FOR NEXT FEW YEARS STOP SUGGEST YOU BOOK EMILY HOWEVER BEFORE CYRUS BEATS YOU TO IT STOP DELIGHTED TO FIND DUCHESS STILL INDESTRUCTIBLE ALTHOUGH NOT FOR WANT OF TRYING STOP RETURNING HER TO YOU ONLY SLIGHTLY BRUISED WITH LOVE AND KISSES FARRELL.

"Now what," said Carstairs, "is that all about?"

"I suspect he'd been drinking, sir," said Bishop, and tossed the cable into the wastebasket.

MRS. POLLIFAX AND THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

This book is happily dedicated
to
Jon Butters and Jackie Johnson
&
Chris Butters and Kim Herrick

THE VILLAGE OF CHIANG SAEN IN NORTHERN THAILAND LIES ALONG the Mekong River near the apex of the Golden Triangle where Laos, Burma and Thailand meet. Its main street is shadowed by palms and by a long line of thatched roofs under which shops have proliferated, and where the public commerce of the village takes place. There are guesthouses where more private transactions take place, and a restaurant where one can lunch and gaze across the broad calm Mekong, watch the occasional long-tailed boat motor up or down the river and observe the low line of trees and yellow sand on the opposite Laotian shore. There are also two *wats* for tourists to visit, if interested in the history of the area: the Wat Pa Sak, and the Wat Prathat Chom Kitto, which dates back to the tenth century when Chiang Saen was the site of a very ancient kingdom.

In one of the thatch-roofed guesthouses, on a certain afternoon in October, a man stood ransacking the desk files of an American *farang* who lay curled up on a nearby low couch. If the resident *farang* saw the intruder he gave no indication of it: his wide-open eyes were unfocused and their pupils dilated, the expression on his face intent on an interior world of fantasies and delusions. As the intruder found and read certain papers in the file he grunted, giving sidelong glances at the man on the couch, and then he very carefully replaced the papers. Only one of them captured his attention to the end; it held an address that he copied in pencil on a slip of crumpled paper, forming the letters with care.

Walking noiselessly across the room, he helped himself to a pen, an envelope, a handful of Thai stamps and a sheet of writing paper before he left the house, closing the door quietly behind him. Presently, seated comfortably under a tree by the river he copied out the address on the long white envelope. It read:

Mr. James T. Carstairs,
P. O. Box 4023,
Baltimore, Maryland, USA

Nibbling thoughtfully at the tip of the pen, he began to write his message on the sheet of paper. When he had finished—it was a long message—he took out a pad of ink, rubbed his thumb across it and added his fingerprint to the note, which he signed in block letters RUAMSAK.

With the letter stamped and sealed he held it for a moment in his hand as if testing its weight, but actually he was weighing the arduous path that he was about to take: to post a letter to the United States in Chiang Saen would be dangerous, inviting comment and attention, which meant that he would have to drive to Mae Sai or even as far as Chiang Rai to post it, and then he would have to frequently check the receiving address as well. He sighed as he reflected on how very inconvenient all this was going to be for a busy man, but his sigh was followed by a shrug; he had already learned what kind of money was being paid for information and he had asked himself why others should be paid for what he knew. He would insist on being paid in gold, and to propitiate the *phi*-spirits he would give a little money to the monks and take a garland of flowers to his house-shrine, *phraphuum*.

It was decided. It would be done.

Tucking the letter into his belt, he rose and set out for Mae Sai to mail his letter to a distant Baltimore. It would be postmarked October 17, and he thought the information he was sending would please the Americans very much and assure him of a reply.

CHAPTER 1

SUNSHINE POURED LIKE MELTED BUTTER ACROSS OAK FLOORS; ICE melting from the roof produced rhythmic and musical *pings*! on the terrace outside. It was January, and Mrs. Pollifax, list in hand, looked doubtfully at the pair of suitcases standing by the front door and said, "Are you quite sure we've not forgotten something?"

Cyrus Reed said dryly, "Emily, you've gone over that list four times this morning. Between my legal mind and your imaginative one, how could anything have been overlooked?"

"It's the imaginative half that worries me," she told him frankly. "I know I packed your precious survival food —those six tins of sardines— but now I'm wondering if I packed my malaria tablets, and if so, where?"

Cyrus replied by grasping her by the shoulders and steering her into the kitchen. "Breakfast, Emily," he said firmly. "Scrambled eggs are waiting. My God, Emily, after all the traveling you've done—"

She smiled up at him sunnily, an act that required a major tilt of the head because Cyrus was well over six feet tall. "Traveling, yes," she reminded him, "but you know I've never been a real tourist before. Only a pretend one for Carstairs and the Department."

"Yes, I know," he said, amused. "Getting bashed over the head by an assassin in Zambia—"

"Well, I'd never have met you if—"

"—not to mention sniffing out the KGB in China."

She noticed that very wisely he was not including her last adventure, when the odds had caught up with her and she had endured the nearly worst that could happen. "Well, it does seem strange," she mused, taking her place at the table. "A real holiday, not a care in the world . . . Delicious eggs," she told him, fork in hand. "What did you put in them this morning?"

"Garlic, parsley and a pinch of salt," he said, pouring coffee.

"I'll try to remember that when it's my turn. Do you suppose I tucked the malaria tablets in with the vitamins, Cyrus? We leave in four hours," she reminded him.

He smiled and lifted his glass of orange juice. "To Thailand, m'dear—and to malaria tablets *definitely* packed with your vitamins."

"Good," she said, and nodded happily, still very aware that she'd nearly lost all this, as well as her life, in Hong Kong a few months ago, and grateful that she could still look at Cyrus across the breakfast table each morning, at his thatch of white hair, the broad shoulders, his sleepy smile and the eyes set so oddly in his face that he resembled a Chinese mandarin. "To temple bells and dancing girls and elephants," she said, touching her glass to his, and then as the doorbell stridently rang she put down her glass and sighed. "Now who on earth can that be at ten o'clock on a Sunday morning!"

"Only one way to find out," Cyrus told her.

"I'll go—you made breakfast," she said, and pushed back her chair and hurried into the living room, annoyed that whoever was ringing their doorbell seemed determined to continue until acknowledged. Circumnavigating the suitcases, she opened the door and drew in her breath sharply: an attractive sandy-haired man in a sheepskin jacket stood beaming at her, attaché case in hand.

"Thank God you're still here," he said, and removed his finger from the doorbell.

"Bishop?" she faltered. "*Bishop?*"

Cyrus, following her to the door, said doubtfully, "Bishop? Met you last June, didn't I? Bishop, isn't it?"

"I seem to have trouble establishing my identity this morning," said Bishop cheerfully. "You're making me feel like an apparition from the spirit world but I'm quite alive, thank you, although in danger of freezing to death standing here. May I come in?"

"Coffee," said Mrs. Pollifax, nodding. "Come in at *once*, Bishop, although you must admit—" Abandoning her sentence, she led him into the living room and divested him of his coat, her mind already racing with thoughts of what his appearance meant, because Bishop was assistant to Carstairs of the CIA, and although she and Bishop were excellent friends they never met face to face without its signaling a new adventure.

Except what an inopportune moment, she thought, when they were leaving in less than four hours for the airport and their flight to Bangkok; they would have to refuse him, of course, any change being

absolutely impossible when she and Cyrus had spent so many weeks planning this holiday.

"No eggs left," Cyrus told him. "Settle for half a Danish and coffee?"

"The gods are smiling," said Bishop, following him into the kitchen and rubbing his hands together. "Oh handsome," he said, glancing around appreciatively. "Lots of sunshine."

"Sit and revive," Mrs. Pollifax told him, coffeepot in hand.

Cyrus presented him with what remained of a large Danish pastry and sat down facing him. He said bluntly, "Should tell you we're leaving on holiday in four hours."

Bishop, crumbs dropping all around him, smiled and nodded his head. "So Emily says," he said, his mouth full. Swallowing, he took a sip of coffee and leaned back in his chair. "Nothing like a transfusion of coffee, is there? I'm really getting too old for this sort of rushing around but I've caught you in time, thank Heaven, which I must say is satisfying. I had to move so fast there wasn't time to phone."

"Hard to believe," said Cyrus, looking amused.

"On the contrary I left Virginia at 3 A.M. that's three o'clock in the *morning*," he emphasized. "Enough to infect anyone with martyrdom."

He didn't look martyred, thought Mrs. Pollifax, nor did he look at all old from rushing about; he was wearing a shirt open at the neck and a soft blue sweater over it, and he looked astonishingly boyish in spite of the frenetic life he lived as Carstairs's aide and the years that she'd known him. "What," she asked, "has produced this wild urge to have coffee with us?"

"Thailand," he said.

Mrs. Pollifax stared at him blankly. "Did I mention it to you?"

"Of course—in your Christmas note. 'P.S.,' you wrote, 'Cyrus and I are off to Thailand January 12th, and for nothing but a holiday, isn't that amazing?' "

Cyrus said dryly, "I take it no longer?" Despite his cryptic manner of talking and his sleepy eyes the air of laziness that he exuded was totally deceptive; Mrs. Pollifax knew that he was already probing Bishop's psyche adroitly and shrewdly.

Bishop smiled disarmingly. "Well—here you are, all packed and ready to go, which is too splendid a coincidence to be overlooked when we need a pair of Innocent Tourists for Thailand in a hurry—in fact, needed them practically yesterday. Damn providential, actually." He added politely, "Just where do you plan to go first?"

"We intend to browse," Mrs. Pollifax told him. "A few days in Bangkok and then we'll fly to Sukotai the old kingdom, you know—

and inspect all the temples, and then go on to Chiang Mai . . . I understand that venturing farther north isn't safe yet for tourists."

Bishop put down his cup of coffee and shook his head. "Now there you're wrong, you must have an out-of-date guidebook. It's perfectly safe now in the north so long as you don't wander off the beaten paths. The area's been opened up in the past few years, thanks to a road built clear up to the Laotian and Burmese borders. It's no longer isolated: schools are being built, the border patrol's active . . . All beside the point, however, because all we'd ask, if you could slightly rearrange "

"Still opium?" interrupted Cyrus.

"Opium?" Bishop said blankly. "Oh, the Golden Triangle, and all that. Well, of course opium's not easily eradicated when the hill tribes in the north have grown it for generations but things are changing, you know. The King's been active in that, researching and promoting substitute crops—coffee, tobacco, that sort of thing— and there's a limit now on how many acres of poppies the hill tribes can plant for their own use. And then of course as you've probably read—the United States subsidizes raids on the poppy fields when any of them get out of hand." He shrugged. "Of course a lot of the stuff still comes into the country from Burma so no one can say there's not still a problem but that needn't concern you. If you could rearrange your—"

Mrs. Pollifax, having done her homework, nodded wisely. "The Shans."

"I beg your pardon?"

"The Shans in Burma, just over the mountains, the ones still rebelling against joining the union of Burma."

"You do seem informed," he said appreciatively. "Yes, they're pretty much the culprits where drug smuggling's concerned—still wanting an autonomous state and to be independent of Burma, and of course the only way they can buy weapons to fight their war is to sell their opium for guns."

"In Thailand," contributed Cyrus.

"Yes, but this has nothing to do with look, it's Chiang Mai we hope you can get to as quickly as possible," he explained, "and Chiang Mai, I can assure you, is nearly a hundred miles from the Golden Triangle. Could you—*would* you—consider rearranging your itinerary by going to Chiang Mai first? On a very *small* errand," he added.

Cyrus chuckled. "So small you've come all the way from Virginia on a Sunday morning?"

"Small for you, important for us," Bishop told him brightly. "Strictly a matter of picking up a packet of information on Thursday morning from a chap in Chiang Mai named Ruamsak."

"How on earth do you spell *that*?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

Bishop spelled it for her. "Very mysterious chap, we don't know a thing about him except that twice he's sent us surprisingly valuable and accurate information."

Cyrus, regarding Bishop steadily, said, "Not sure that Emily — after the Hong Kong misadventure—ought to tackle anything for you so soon. Just getting over it, you know. This trip—pure holiday — is actually to—"

Bishop's face sobered as he turned to Mrs. Pollifax. "Still nightmares?"

She shook her head. "Not now, no." She smiled. "Cyrus recommended some wonderful therapy for me, I've been taking lessons in magic from a retired magician."

Bishop whistled. "Good heavens! Karate, yoga and now magic . . . Have you sawed anyone in half yet?"

She grinned. "No, but I'm growing rather clever at palming coins."

He nodded. "Okay, you no longer have nightmares and you can palm coins but how is your back?"

"Healing."

Bishop looked at Cyrus and then at her and shook his head. "I must be losing my grip but I suddenly realize I can't push this Chiang Mai errand no matter *how* uncomplicated it is. The Department can be quite ruthless, you know, but damn it I can't. If you're still recovering from Hong Kong I'll cease and desist and leave quietly."

Mrs. Pollifax considered this thoughtfully. "On the other hand," she said softly, and hesitated. "On the other hand don't they say that when a person has fallen off a horse the best prescription is to climb back on the horse at once? If it's just a small errand—"

Cyrus said, "It wasn't a horse you fell off, Emily."

"No," she admitted, "but — is that all? Just collect a small package?"

Bishop nodded. "That's all."

In the silence that followed Cyrus said pleasantly, "Isn't your department already well represented in Thailand, what with the country providing air bases for the United States during the Vietnam War, and it being friend and ally, bastion of freedom and all that?"

"Well — it's all a bit tricky," Bishop said cautiously. "Actually we're not that popular anymore. At their insistence we pulled out of Thailand in 1976 –removed our radar listening posts, our planes, soldiers, et cetera, and they at once began signing friendship pacts with China, Laos, Cambodia — or Kampuchea as it's called now. You might say for survival, because — well, just look at any map: to the west lies Burma, their traditional, centuries-old enemy—Burma in the old days plundered

and occupied Thailand—and to the north lies China, which in 1976 was supplying Thai insurgents in the north with weapons at the same time it was signing that friendship pact with the Thai government in Bangkok. To the northeast is Laos, now taken over by Hanoi, while on their eastern border lies Cambodia—sorry, Kampuchea—into which the Vietnamese have moved, precipitating certain hells along that border, as you know, and a flood of refugees.

"Thailand is thus surrounded. Presumably the government at some point decided they couldn't fully trust us to protect them, in spite of our having a number of treaties with them, so they opted for the ASEAN and their own resources." He sighed. "I might add that Thailand keeps reaching for a democracy that it can't manage yet the army dominates the government—and this has resulted in umpteen coups in the past. The governments come and go . . . only the King and Buddhism keep things glued together . . . *so far.*

"Under such circumstances," he added with a faint smile, "we try to keep open private channels of information so we know what's going on behind the scenes. Very unofficially, of course."

"Of course," said Mrs. Pollifax dryly. "But why us, Bishop?"

"Well, to be absolutely frank with you—"

"Yes, do be," she told him cordially.

"To be absolutely frank we don't want anyone, Thai or American, to hear about this—er—connection. Ruamsak's new, and shows signs of being too valuable an informant to risk anyone learning about him, for his sake as well as ours."

"Ah, an informer," said Mrs. Pollifax, nodding pleasantly. "Cyrus, what do you think?"

He said firmly, "Has to be up to you, m'dear. Sounds simple enough, of course. As usual," he added dryly.

"And Cyrus would be with you," Bishop added, a note of hope returning to his voice.

After a glance at his wife's face Cyrus said, "Just what is it we'd be picking up?"

"Information effectively disguised, but how we don't know. We've been told it's a very incriminating document too dangerous to mail, so it will be turned over to you disguised as some sort of tourist souvenir. We've also been told that Ruamsak can't linger for more than a few hours in Chiang Mai—it *has* to be Thursday morning."

Mrs. Pollifax thought about this. She could detect none of Bishop's usual tension when any assignment proposed to her held the possibility of danger. She decided that she believed him when he described it as a very small errand, and certainly his precipitous arrival on their doorstep

implied a definite need. Looking at Cyrus, she said, "I suppose we could manage that easily enough. Would you mind our mixing business with pleasure?"

Cyrus studied her face; apparently he was reassured by what he saw. "Of course I wouldn't mind. So long as you feel comfortable about it, keeping that horse analogy in mind, no problem."

Bishop drew a deep sigh of relief. "Wonderful," he said, and opened his attaché case. "Somewhere I've a map of Chiang Mai for you . . ."

Cyrus frowned. "Hearing you say Chiang Mai has been ringing bells." His frown deepened. "Didn't John Lloyd Matthews disappear in Chiang Mai on a visit there?"

Bishop looked at him in surprise. "But that was years ago—nearly ten years ago, surely! What a memory."

"Ah, but you see I knew him," Cyrus said mildly. "High school days in Connecticut. Played baseball together—on the same boxing team, too. Had a good left."

"Who on earth are we talking about?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"John Lloyd Matthews," explained Bishop. "U.S. diplomat in Bangkok who disappeared some years back, rather like the famous old Judge Crater disappearance."

Because the details had been so dramatic at the time Mrs. Pollifax found herself remembering, too. "But yes," she said eagerly, "didn't he leave a cigar burning on the terrace and a book open and he'd just been brought coffee, and then minutes later his host came back and he was gone?"

"That's the one," Bishop said, spreading out a street map of Chiang Mai on the table.

"No trace ever?" inquired Cyrus.

Bishop shook his head. "Not a single clue. I believe the final conclusion was that he'd been seized for ransom by insurgents or drug people—those were rougher days in the north and put up a fight at some point and was killed and buried in the jungle."

"I wondered at the time if he worked for you people," Cyrus said.

Bishop looked amused. "You're not the first person to wonder that, it makes a great story, but I can assure you absolutely not. He was, however, instrumental in getting Thailand the very best of deals when we asked for air bases there—he really loved Thailand and you'll find that your guidebook lists a couple of statues of him over there. Here we are . . ." He smoothed out the map of Chiang Mai and they leaned closer. "I've written all the details down but here's where you'll find Ruamsak, behind one of the shops near the eastern gate see Thapae Road? You'll

note the printed locations of the Night Bazaar, Wat Chang Khong, Wat Mahawan . . . see?"

They nodded.

"You'll find Thapae Road lined with shops: lacquerware, silk, cotton, et cetera . . . Between the Pekanant Silk Shop—the name's in English as well as Thai and the Apichat Lacquerware there's a narrow alley. Duck down it, and behind the lacquerware factory there's a small abandoned house—a hut really, I suppose—with what Ruamsak describes as a wooden fence spilling over with bougainvillea. Ruamsak will be expecting to deliver his package to someone on Thursday morning between eight o'clock and twelve noon."

Cyrus grunted. "Rather conspicuous, isn't it, a pair of tourists ducking down a private alley?"

Bishop grinned. "Tourists with cameras are forgiven anything. Just be sure you have cameras."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pollifax, growing interested now, "but how will this person this Ruamsak—know we're anything more than tourists with cameras?"

"Because you'll give him this," Bishop said, bringing out a terra-cotta object from his pocket and placing it on the table.

Mrs. Pollifax picked it up and found that it fitted neatly into the palm of her hand but with much more weight than its size implied. She held it out for Cyrus to see: an elongated oval with a primitive Buddha-image molded into its terra-cotta background.

"Buddhist votive tablet," explained Bishop. "You'll find people carrying them in Thailand for protection."

"It's certainly charming," said Mrs. Pollifax, "but isn't it rather heavy to carry around in a pocket?"

Bishop grinned. "Actually what you're holding is a cube of gold bullion with a thin veneer of terra-cotta to conceal it. Just so you know what you've got there."

"Payment?" said Cyrus.

"Partial, yes." Closing his attaché case, he smiled at them. "So that's it, then. With the time change you'll arrive in Bangkok late Monday evening and I suggest you fly to Chiang Mai on Wednesday, which will give you a full day on Tuesday to recover from jet lag. We'll reserve two seats for you on the plane to Chiang Mai, and a room for you there at the Orchid Hotel. Where are you staying in Bangkok?"

"The Oriental Hotel."

"Good." He nodded. "We'll see to it that your plane tickets are delivered to you there." He stood up, bestowing a warm smile on them both. "I can't tell you what a relief it will be to not worry about you this

time—two of you, after all!—not to mention your agreeing to do this for us. I wish you both a wonderful and well-deserved holiday . . . Oh, and by the way, we'd appreciate your phoning us from Chiang Mai on Thursday once you've met with Ruamsak. Carstairs likes to tidy up loose ends and cross things off lists and all that."

"You must remember us to him," said Mrs. Pollifax. "And how do we deliver this package to you?"

"At the moment," said Bishop crisply, "our principal concern—of the utmost importance—is to collect the package before Ruamsak vanishes. We'll have instructions ready when you call us." He held out his hand to Cyrus and then leaned over Mrs. Pollifax and gave her a quick hug. "Thanks again, and take care of yourselves," he said.

"I'll see you to the door," Cyrus told him, and ushered him out, leaving Mrs. Pollifax alone at the table to stare at the remnants of her egg.

She reflected that the stripes on her back had turned into scar tissue, the nightmares had ceased, and she had been certain that the experience in Hong Kong had in no way affected her spirit.

It hadn't, had it?

A very small errand, she reminded herself. When a person has fallen off a horse . . .

Exactly, she told herself firmly, drew a deep breath and stood up to begin clearing the breakfast dishes from the table. Nevertheless she felt shaken by her sudden attack of anxiety. On his return to the kitchen Cyrus would insist on probing her feelings about Bishop's small errand and she was determined that he not suspect her sudden uneasiness. As she carried dishes across the room and inserted them into the dishwasher she searched for a change in subject to distract him.

When he strolled back into the kitchen she was ready for him and met him with a bright smile. "Cyrus, I had no idea you grew up with a future diplomat, even if he did get murdered. Tell me about him!"

She watched the grave look on his face vanish; Cyrus was chuckling. "Well, he wasn't John Lloyd Matthews in those days," he said. "We called him Joker Matthews. Wasn't very diplomatic then, either, the two of us nearly came to blows any number of times over whether Charley Wexler or Bud Hastings should have won the high school boxing championship. Stubborn as a mule, Joker was."

"But you liked him?" she said, smiling. Hearing about Cyrus's many acquaintances never bored her. She felt, however, that Joker Matthews could not possibly measure up to Slip-Fingered Frank or Deadly Eddy, both of whom Cyrus had represented in court a number of times before he became a judge.

"Liked him very much," he said, and proceeded to tell her all about

John Lloyd Matthews, a.k.a. Joker, until she discovered that in distracting Cyrus she had also distracted herself from her doubts; she was ready again for Thailand.

Climbing into his car, Bishop placed the attaché case on the seat beside him, started the car and drove down the driveway to enter Route Two. He did not immediately pick up the car phone to report to Carstairs but waited until he had reached a rest area. Pulling into it, he called the office and when Carstairs came on the line he said, "It's okay, they've agreed to do it."

"Splendid! No problems?"

"Cyrus balked a little, worried about Emily taking this on so soon after Hong Kong but Mrs. Pollifax, bless her, talked of climbing back on a horse immediately after falling off . . . Now what happened after you sent me dashing off in the middle of our midnight conference, anything new?"

There was a moment of silence and then Carstairs said evenly, "What happened after you left is that Upstairs decided we have to learn who and what Ruamsak is, and—"

"*What?*" shouted Bishop.

"— and therefore, after Emily and Cyrus have made contact with him, he'll be placed under surveillance."

"I don't believe it," gasped Bishop. "That's just what you *don't* want!"

"Placed under surveillance," went on Carstairs without expression, "by a chap recommended Upstairs, the surveillant to be a young man from the Bangkok office by the name of McAndrews."

"But he's their computer expert," Bishop said in astonishment.

"I have been told that he's also trained in surveillance."

"Do you believe it? Who on earth Upstairs came up with this brilliant idea? Who did this recommending?"

"Mornajay."

"Mornajay!" exploded Bishop. "By what right?"

Carstairs said coolly, "Since Lance Mornajay is one of my superiors I suppose he has every right, and since he spent ten years in Thailand during the Vietnam War I can only hope he knows what the hell he's doing."

Aha, gloated Bishop, *Carstairs is furious under that brittle calm.*

"McAndrews is to follow Emily and Cyrus from the moment they land at the Chiang Mai airport," he continued, "and thence to the hut off Thapae Road on Thursday."

"I never heard of anything so stupid," protested Bishop. "Does Mor-

najay understand the risks? Does anyone Upstairs? Don't they realize that if Ruamsak discovers he's being followed we'll never hear from him again, and we lose a damn promising informer?"

"There's no time for sulking, Bishop," Carstairs told him. "If you'll tell me just when Emily and Cyrus arrive in Chiang Mai I'll cable time of arrival to this—this McAndrews."

Bishop caught the distaste in Carstairs's voice and was glad for it. Digging into his attaché case, he brought out his notes and repeated the plane's schedule; his lack of sleep was beginning to affect him, and between this and news of Mornajay's interference he felt distinctly irritable.

"All right," Carstairs said, and repeated the hour. "Still parked by the side of the road, Bishop?"

"Of course. Drinking in every pristine word," he said crossly, "and not liking any of it."

"Then I suggest you get moving immediately because all hell's breaking loose again in the Sudan and you're needed. You can sleep on the plane."

"Sleep?" repeated Bishop, starting the car again. "A word vaguely familiar to me, yes, but perhaps as I drive along you could describe it to me, with added descriptions on how it knits the ravel'd sleeve of care and all that?"

But Carstairs had severed the connection. Bishop grinned and settled for the car radio instead and a very loud Jimmie Cliff rendition of "You Can Get It If You Want."

Following that he swore passionately at Mornajay, whom he did not like. Probably nobody did, he thought, but still it was unlike anyone Upstairs to interfere and he shared all of Carstairs's resentment.

CHAPTER 2

TWO DAYS LATER BY THE CALENDAR, BUT ONLY TUESDAY IN HER new time zone, Mrs. Pollifax sat over coffee on the terrace of the Oriental Hotel and gazed with delight at her new surroundings, drawing nourishment from the sight of bougainvillea, jasmine and palm trees, and savoring the warmth of a January day at this opposite corner of the globe. They had arrived late the evening before, and it was noon in Bangkok now, although heaven only knew what time it was at home, probably the middle of the night, she reflected, since she had left Cyrus soundly asleep in their hotel room. She did not feel sleepy at all, or alone either, for the tables slightly below her were filling with people of assorted nationalities; she had already caught snatches of conversation in French, there was a large party of Japanese in one corner and the couple seated behind her were speaking in the clipped accents of the British.

Like a toy paper flower dropped into a glass of water, Mrs. Pollifax felt herself expanding and flowering.

Beyond the terrace the life on the river was equally as interesting to her. Long green ribbons of hyacinth flowed with the current past the terrace and at the moment three barges were passing, each of them with a tiny house perched on its stern. As the barges moved out of view a fantailed sightseeing boat with awnings *put-putted* into midstream, merrily tooting its horn, and before that had disappeared another barge slid into view towing a long line of teak logs on which several men squatted, their colored shirts vivid against the dark wood.

So this is Thailand, she thought dreamily, and then amended this, remembering that most of the country was rural: this was therefore *Bangkok*, which they would presently go out and explore once Cyrus was awake. In the meantime she had already walked out to see the spirit-house that stood at the corner of the hotel to placate any disgruntled

spirits, and she had purchased a huge square of Thai silk at a shop across the street. She wore it tied around her head now, although presently it would have to be exchanged for the handwoven straw hat with a wide brim that she had brought with her, because it was growing steadily warmer and more humid. Even as she thought this a pair of waiters began unfurling striped umbrellas to shade each table from the sun.

At the same moment, as if given his cue — and at such a time Mrs. Pollifax felt the world truly was a stage—a young man in baggy trousers and white shirt walked out of the door holding up a large blackboard and ringing a bell as he moved among the tables. On the blackboard in white chalk was printed the name Mrs. Reed-Pollifax: she was being paged. Waving a hand, she collected her message, paid her bill and left.

Cyrus was waiting for her in the lobby, looking huge among the less bulky Thai and Japanese around him; he was holding an envelope and looking triumphant. "Plane tickets for Chiang Mai, Emily. Just delivered."

"And you're awake!"

"Awake and ready to see Bangkok."

"Not hungry?"

He smiled drowsily at her. "Cheated . . . called room service and had a luxurious breakfast in the bathtub. Very therapeutic."

"Exactly how holidays should be," she told him, beaming.

"Golden Buddha first?" he suggested as they strolled toward the exit past palm trees set into huge porcelain tubs.

The glass doors were swung open magically for them by a boy in oriental costume. "Cyrus," she breathed, "I do believe he does nothing but open doors all day. Cyrus, could we take a *tuk-tuk* as they call them, one of those motor scooters with a carriage built into it?"

"Later." Cyrus took her arm and said firmly, "I think after seeing all the traffic last night — and they drive like bats out of hell here—we take a taxi. Don't mean to deprive you, m'dear, but I've a horror of being squashed between two buses. The Wat Trimitr—Golden Buddha," he told the cab driver, and they set off to see their first temple.

There was nothing so enlivening, thought Mrs. Pollifax, than to be plunged into a new culture and to grope for a key to its workings. She was to feel later that their visit to the Wat Trimitr summed up many of the contradictions of Bangkok and of Thailand because much to her astonishment the Golden Buddha — made of five and a half tons of pure gold — stood in a temple on the edge of Chinatown near the railway station, on a shabby and congested street that in New York might even be called a slum. Yet there sat the Buddha, huge and massive, its five and a half tons of gleaming gold smiling tranquilly down at those who casu-

ally wandered in to bow three times, kneel, leave offerings of paper flowers, ribbons, incense, or to take photographs.

"And not a guard in sight," she whispered to Cyrus.

"But accessible," pointed out Cyrus. "Available to everyone."

She admitted that she liked that, as well as the story behind it: that when it was found it had been a huge *stucco* Buddha, accepted as such until in being moved by a crane it was accidentally dropped, chipping off a corner of the stucco to reveal the glitter of gold underneath. And now it was here, just off a crowded courtyard in a busy temple, and of such value that it boggled the mind.

"But I'd still worry about it," she said, adding earnestly, "I don't mean anyone in Thailand would consider making off with it because it's a sacred relic, but when you think of how art treasures are being stolen everywhere—"

"A bit unwieldy," pointed out Cyrus. "Need a derrick. Then what?"

"I don't know," she said, troubled, "but I'd worry. I don't think they *realize*—"

He smiled at her. "Already thinking how?"

"Of course not," she told him, but she had the grace to blush. "Well," she admitted, "there's perhaps a small amount of the criminal in all of us."

Cyrus's eyes were twinkling. "Speak for yourself, m'dear, but softly, or we'll be hauled off for questioning."

And there it was, she thought ruefully, her imagination was so *lamentably* undisciplined. There had always been an unconventional Emily under the various Mrs. Pollifaxes who had raised two children, grown geraniums, chaired Garden Clubs and poured tea but this odd bent had never been acknowledged, and when it occasionally surfaced it had been considered an aberration, at least until she had begun to work for Carstairs and the Department, where she had discovered that odd bents fitted being a spy very well.

Perhaps, she thought doubtfully, such a perverse way of looking at things was a prerequisite for any agent but she wondered if sometimes it was a little hard on Cyrus. He was very tolerant but, after all, he had been a judge for years, passing sentence on the criminals of the world, and then absurdly he had married a woman who held a brown belt in karate and occasionally entered a netherworld where the same laws that Cyrus represented had to be twisted, if not broken. It must strike him as ironic, she thought, but then Cyrus enjoyed irony. Nevertheless she wondered for a brief moment whether her risky assignments for Carstairs might have brought a mutation in her thinking.

After pondering this she decided that she still had scruples and, vir-

tuously, that being aware of how the criminal mind worked was just as important as making blancmanage and growing geraniums in her more conventional life. With this decided, for Mrs. Pollifax was conscientious by nature, she dismissed her philosophical doubts and was happy to move on with Cyrus to the Grand Palace.

Here they wandered through an enchanted fairyland of color and glitter, a virtual forest of *chedis* with their pointed spires of gilt, mosaic or gold. Pausing under the sweeping curves of slant-roofed temples, they gazed down vista after vista of gilt, blue tile, brilliant frescoes, trees, flowers, often interrupted by the tall thin stems of gilt parasols that looked like huge and glorious gold goblets. They came at last to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha where Mrs. Pollifax found herself disappointed because she had expected the Emerald Buddha to be at least the size of the five-and-a-half-ton Golden Buddha but instead it was quite small, it could be measured in inches and was almost obscured by the smoke from joss sticks.

At last, fleeing the rising heat they returned to the hotel where they gave themselves up to other joys of being on holiday, dining in one of the hotel's restaurants and sampling strange exotic foods.

"But spicy," Cyrus commented. "Glad now I brought my sardines."

"Oh, Cyrus, surely not yet?"

"Not yet, no," he said amiably, "but I certainly plan to slip one or two tins into my camera case tonight for easy access. I am," he added unnecessarily, "a large man. I need protein."

She laughed. Later, returned to their room, she laughed again as he tenderly brought out two of his six sardine tins and slid them into his camera bag. She was still smiling as she resumed addressing postcards to her son, Roger, daughter, Jane, and to her old neighbor Miss Hartshorne but her thoughts were not entirely on the cheerful messages that she wrote. She was remembering that tomorrow they would fly off to Chiang Mai to meet a man named Ruamsak, and she found herself wondering what Ruamsak was doing and thinking at this hour, and whether he might already be in Chiang Mai waiting for Thursday morning . . .

CHAPTER 3

RUAMSAK CAME EARLY TO THE HUT BEHIND THAPAE ROAD BUT HE arrived by a circuitous route: he approached it from another alley, making his way to the rear of the house by climbing walls, which alarmed a large family of ducks, and tiptoeing down rows of growing vegetables. He had chosen not to sleep in the hut, which would have saved him money, but had instead spent the night in a hostel run by a Chinese. Yesterday he had checked the house and found it empty but even so he was wary: the hut was built six feet off the ground, of split bamboo and thatch, and he first crept underneath the floor and squatted there, listening for signs that someone might have preceded him. After some minutes, hearing only the harsh click of a gecko, he climbed into the hut by way of the shutterless window in the back, and at once inspected the handfuls of sand that he'd scattered yesterday at the door and under each of the four windows. No one had been here: he looked behind the bamboo screen that ran halfway down the center of the room and then he walked in behind the screen and sat down, cross-legged, to wait.

He was expecting two people in the hours ahead: the unknown person to whom he would deliver his information but first of all the man to whom he had entrusted the letter that was undeniable proof of what he already knew and carried in his head. He had thought for a long time about how to conceal this letter, and he felt that he had been very ingenious in seizing on the use of magic talismans and white magic. He had planned it carefully: first he had trimmed the letter to the size of a *yantra* that he'd borrowed from his sister, one of several that hung by string over her new baby to guard it against evil spirits. Since the *yantra* had been consecrated by the monks he felt that it would guard him, too, against evil spirits, as well as bring him good fortune, and a man could not have too much good fortune. This particular *yantra* was called a *Yan*

Trinishinghe, and was a square of paper with four squares drawn diagonally across the main one, leaving half-squares at each corner, with certain mystical numbers and figures inscribed in each space. Behind this he had lightly attached the cut-down letter and had then taken both to an out-of-the-way lacquer factory yesterday. Showing the man the *yantra*, but not the letter concealed behind it, he had rolled the two thin sheets of paper into a tube and asked to have this set into a *phyot* arm-ring.

The man had exclaimed, "This is protection indeed, a *yantra* and a *phyot* arm-ring!"

But despite the money that had been placed on the counter in front of the man he had insisted it could not be done by nightfall. It was true, he said, that weaving a circle of cotton yarn around the tube of paper could be done in an hour or two but the lac that would hold it all together in the shape of an arm-ring needed time in the drying cellar. Failing this, he said, the lac would melt—*laly!* and there would be nothing the next day but a piece of paper and a handful of cotton yarn. He had been very firm: he was a craftsman, he said, and in such matters was to be trusted.

And so Ruamsak had taken back half the money on the counter, promising it to the man on delivery, promising even more money the earlier in the morning the arm-ring was brought to him, and he had drawn a sketch of the place where he was to bring it.

Except for this delay he felt that he'd done well. Even if the man in the lacquer shop unfolded the rolled-up *yantra* and discovered the letter behind it the words were in a language he wouldn't understand—Ruamsak had made certain of this before choosing the shop—and the man was being well paid. He would arrive before eight Ruamsak glanced at the slant of the sun outside the window and nodded and following this he would have the arm-ring to hand over to the stranger who came for it; in return he would be given his gold.

He turned his head; his senses had picked up the faint whisper of cloth and the creak of bamboo: someone was entering the house. Silently he rose to his feet and waited. The footsteps halted and then moved toward the partition, a head appeared and then a man stepped inside the half of the room the Ruamsak occupied.

It was not the man from the lacquer shop; this was someone he'd never seen before and Ruamsak wondered if this was the man to whom he should deliver the letter. He was about to greet him when the man took a step forward and Ruamsak saw the knife in his hand—a killing knife . . .

A chill raced down Ruamsak's spine.

Jacoby, he thought . . . Jacoby must have known all the time, must

have been alert enough to know his files had been ransacked, and now he had sent a man to kill him.

He swore at himself for having come unarmed; he had walked into a trap like a bird coaxed into a cage by a handful of rice.

Jai yen yen, he told himself to slow the racing of his heart: *keep your cool*. He waited, knowing there would be others outside as well, and that they would not allow him to leave here alive . . . Death had entered this room.

At ten minutes past eight, with cameras conspicuously in hand, Mrs. Pollifax and Cyrus climbed into a taxi and set out for Thapae Road. They had so far enjoyed Chiang Mai very much, and, following their errand on Thapae Road, they planned to enjoy the remaining hours even more. Certainly it was a more relaxed city than Bangkok, so relaxed that Cyrus had agreed to ride in a *tuk-tuk* yesterday after their arrival, observing that Chiang Mai drivers might drive with a certain lightheartedness but with an absence of the frenzy that had dismayed him in Bangkok. In the evening they had dined at the Old Chiang Mai Cultural Center and had then watched tribal dancers perform, and it was here that they'd had a very pleasant talk with a young American named McAndrews, who seemed to be following the same itinerary: his *tuk-tuk* had passed them on the street, he'd been seen in the lobby of their hotel, and in its restaurant, and he had dined at the Cultural Center, too, at which point they had introduced themselves.

A very nice young man, currently working in Bangkok with an American aid program, he said, but it was strange, thought Mrs. Pollifax, how deeply embarrassed he'd seemed when Cyrus first spoke to him.

The morning air was deliciously cool and the distant mountains still a hazy blue. They drove past tree-shaded villas and sleek government buildings until gradually the streets grew narrower and busier and they came to Thapae Road. Mrs. Pollifax, consulting Bishop's memo, kept an eye out for the Apichat Lacquerware Factory until "*There!*" she cried and the taxi drew over to the curb. Paying the driver, they stepped out into Thapae Road.

"Thursday morning, and here we are," Cyrus said, and lifted his camera out of its case, nearly spilling out his two sardine cans as well.

"And there's the alley," Mrs. Pollifax pointed out in a low voice.

They had disembarked in front of the lacquer shop, which was open to the street with all sorts of treasures piled on shelves to catch the eye, and the outline of still more in the shadowy rear: lacquer cups, vases, bowls, dishes, trays, chests, jewelry boxes . . . A gnarled little old

woman watched them from a chair inside, hands folded tranquilly in her lap. Mrs. Pollifax smiled at her, lifted her camera and snapped a picture, and then turned to photograph the street. *Protective covering*, she thought, as she edged slowly toward the alley.

Cyrus, she saw, was already standing at the edge of the alleyway, his attention captured by a huge earthenware jug placed at the corner of the lacquer shop. "Emily," he called to her, "just look at this! Magnificent, isn't it?"

She joined him and was at once seized by a rare spasm of acquisitiveness. "Wouldn't that look wonderful in our garden at home?" she said eagerly. It was at least four feet high and made of terra-cotta, with a beautifully graceful line to it.

"Water jug, I suppose," Cyrus said. "Cistern?"

"And made entirely by hand, which makes it so lovely. Do you suppose they'd sell it?"

Cyrus looked at her, amused. "And just how do you think you'd carry this back to the United States?"

"Spoilsport," she told him, running an admiring finger over its texture. "Beautiful," she told the old lady seated nearby. "So big!"

The woman beamed and nodded. *"Ka yai!"*

Reluctantly Mrs. Pollifax tore herself away, remembering that she was not here on Thapae Road to admire water jugs. Moving to the entrance of the alley, she glanced over her shoulder. "Coming, Cyrus?"

"In just a minute," he said, nodding, and brought up his camera for a snapshot of the terra-cotta jug.

Mrs. Pollifax turned into the alley, nearly colliding with a man running out of it, a shabby-looking Thai in a great hurry who slowed only to avoid running into her. The man brushed against Cyrus, backed away with mumbled apologies, hesitated and then ran away, leaving Mrs. Pollifax to continue unimpeded. Halfway down the alley she stopped and glanced back, surprised to find that Cyrus was not immediately behind her. She saw that he remained at the entrance to the alley, still, with what seemed to her an extremely odd expression on his face. She was tempted to go back and see what mesmerized him but since she was halfway down the alley—and the purpose of their being here was to walk down this alley she decided not to tempt fate. Not at all the thing, she decided, to stroll down the alley, return to the street and then walk down it again *much* too conspicuous. She therefore continued on her way, camera in hand, and almost at once caught a flash of brilliant pink ahead. She had reached their destination.

Bougainvillea spilled over the weatherbeaten fence just as described, a brilliant eruption of color in a somber burnt-sienna scene. She walked

through the gap in the fence and crossed a small yard of dull red barren earth to confront what looked more like a hut than a house: it leaned slightly to the left, stood high off the ground on posts and was built of bamboo walls with a thatch roof. A doorway had been cut squarely in the center, but lacked a door, she noted, and a square window was placed symmetrically on either side of it. Mrs. Pollifax mounted five steps and peered into a dark, smoke-stained room.

Inserted into the rear wall directly across from her was a square window through which she could see brilliant sunshine, but since not a ray of it entered the room it appeared more like a bright square of tapestry hung on the wall. She stepped inside, and as her eyes began adjusting to the darkness she discovered a room empty of all but broken shards lying here and there. A woven bamboo partition ran halfway down the center. She called softly, "Anybody here?"

There was only silence until a lizard slithered across the floor, startling her.

Where, she wondered, was Cyrus and why was he taking so long to catch up with her?

She walked around the bamboo screen and into a space equally as dim, with another window through which she could see brilliant but unilluminating sunshine. This room was occupied and she stopped when she saw its occupant, whose sleep she was obviously interrupting. He lay on his back in the center of the space, a square of bright cloth flung over his face to keep out the light, although she wondered crossly what light could possibly disturb him in such a dark room. He looked so relaxed—as if sleep had so suddenly overwhelmed him that he'd simply flung himself on the floor—that she hesitated at waking him.

Tactfully she cleared her throat; when this produced no reaction she added, "Good morning!" and then, hoping she pronounced it correctly, *"Sawadee?"*

And then as her eyes drew in more detail they returned to the shape that rose vertically out of his shirt, just over the heart, which at first glance she had assumed to be some intricate Thai design in the shirt. It was not a design: it was a knife.

Mrs. Pollifax stiffened in shock, and then, *"Oh!"* she gasped and rushed forward to kneel beside him.

Gently, fearfully, she removed the square of bright cloth, staring now at the man in horror because his eyes were wide open and unseeing. She put out a hand to feel for a heartbeat, recoiled at the knife imprisoned in his flesh and reached instead for his outflung hand. There was no pulse: Ruamsak was dead.

Outside the room a rooster crowed and some distance away a child

called out. She thought, *Carstairs isn't going to like this . . . I don't like it either*, and then, *I must stay calm, there's nothing more to be done*. But as the initial shock passed she realized that of course there was something more to be done: she was going to have to search Ruamsak's body for whatever he had come to give them.

She sat back and stared down at him: a sturdily built man in his thirties, she guessed, a lean hungry face with the high cheekbones of his race, a long jaw, the mouth twisted into a grimace of shock or pain. His clothes were nondescript: dusty black cotton trousers and sandals on his feet, the gray shirt clean except for a seepage of blood around the knife. She wondered how long he'd been dead and reached out for his hand again and found it warm, with no signs of rigor mortis. This was vaguely alarming because it meant that he'd not been dead for long, he might even have been alive when she and Cyrus left the hotel, which meant . . . but she did not want to think of what that meant, the sooner she was out of here the better, *except where was Cyrus*? She slipped her hand into Ruamsak's left trouser pocket and found it empty. Checking the other pocket, she drew out four crumpled 25-*baht* notes; none of them looked as if they held a message but she dropped them into her purse to examine later.

It was at this moment, still kneeling beside Ruamsak, that Mrs. Pollifax realized that she and the dead man were not alone in this room, that someone else –someone living was with them, and was standing in the shadows by the window. The shock of finding Ruamsak dead had sharpened her senses so that she could not mistake the whisper of cloth as someone shifted from one foot to the other. She glanced up, very alert now, and in the corner saw a shape that did not quite blend in with the shadows: it was a shade lighter and its shape was that of a man.

Staring into the corner, she slowly rose to her feet. "I know you're there," she said. "Did you kill him?"

A second later she rued her lack of tact because the man who walked out of the shadows looked even tougher than the dead man at her feet, and certainly no one to trifle with. He was as solidly built as a wrestler, with a long puckered scar across one cheekbone. The scar made him look like a brigand, more Chinese than Thai. His trousers were rolled up to his knees, exposing thick muscular calves; his blue shirt was wrinkled, and on his head he wore an incongruous dirty linen hat, narrow-brimmed, and very British, a hat straight out of *My Fair Lady*. The hat was jammed as squarely on his head as the lid on a teapot, which would have struck her as comical if he'd not looked so menacing.

And she was alone with him, separated from him only by the body on the floor. She wished fervently that she could retract the words she'd just

spoken, they hung in the air between them, an accusation hurled at a man who was undoubtedly Ruamsak's murderer, and where was *Cyrus*?

The man walked to the body and looked down at it, and then he leaned over and pulled out the knife, which made her shudder. She wondered what karate strikes could possibly have any impact on this man if he planned to kill her next, and she realized that she was too frozen to manage even a scream.

But he remained standing where he was. He examined the knife and then he pulled out his shirt and wiped the blood from it carefully.

She managed a weak, "Do you know him?"

He lifted his eyes and studied her. "Do you?"

At least he spoke English; she shook her head.

"So why are you here?" he asked, eyes narrowed.

"My husband and I" what did one say to a murderer?—"we were taking snapshots —" She held up her camera. "And the alley looked interesting, and —"

"Husband," he said harshly. "Where is this husband?"

His eyes were shrewd as they rested on her; he might wear a funny hat and look like a brigand but he was intelligent and she noticed that he'd not replied to either of her questions. "Outside —somewhere," she stammered.

He glanced again at the dead man on the floor between them. "I think we return you to your husband. At once."

This was good news, she wanted very much to be returned to Cyrus but she managed to say bravely, "And will you call the police?"

She thought he looked amused. He shoved the murder knife in his pocket and jerked his head toward the door. "Show me this husband."

She sighed, failing to see why producing Cyrus was so important to him, unless of course he planned to kill her if she was lying. Obviously there were dimensions to this situation that were obscure at the moment but the important thing was to get out of this house and away from this murderous-looking man. She picked up her purse, slung it over her shoulder and walked to the door.

The brilliance outside was like a blow after the darkness of the hut and she paused on the steps to blink. "Cyrus?" she called.

In front of her stood the fence, framed by its mass of bougainvillea, and beyond that lay the alley, and the alley was empty. She hurried toward it, entering with her brigand companion on her heels, and walked quickly toward the street. The first touch of unease was arriving because Cyrus had been going to follow her, he had *not* followed her and where was he?

She reached the huge earthenware jug and stopped. "This is where I

last saw him," she said over her shoulder to the man behind her. "He was just standing here, looking at this." Her eyes moved among the passersby; she turned and looked up and down the road.

"What did he look like?"

"Tall," she said. "Very big, with —" Her glance moved across the street to a dingy blue van which two men were loading, and as her eyes fell on what they were loading she screamed, *"Cyrus!"*

Without a glance at traffic she plunged into Thapae Road to the cacophony of blowing horns and squealing brakes. "Stop!" she cried. "Stop!"

There were startled glances from the men loading the van; they had been clumsily lifting an inert Cyrus so that he could be crammed into the back of the van but he was large and they were small. At the sound of her screams they shoved him brutally inside, slammed shut the doors, raced to the front, jumped into the van and before she could reach it the van was in motion, nearly running her down.

She stopped in the street and stared after the van, trembling with rage and frustration. "Oh, how dare they!" she cried. "What is happening here?"

Her companion caught up with her and grasped her by the arm. "Get out of the street!" he said. "That was your husband?"

She nodded with tears in her eyes.

"Then quick—come!"

CHAPTER 4

"COME WHERE?" SHE CRIED ANGRILY. "WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME? That was *Cyrus*!"

"Quickly — to follow!" he cried, pulling her along the sidewalk.

"Oh, thank God," she gasped, and ran with him up the street.

"Here," he said, tearing open the door of an ancient truck and she raced around to the other side and jumped into the cab beside him. Wrestling with keys, he started the engine, turned in a broad arc and careered across oncoming traffic, barely avoiding being run down by a bus, a move made even more unnerving because Mrs. Pollifax had forgotten that in Thailand cars drive on the left side of the road.

"Can you see them?" she shouted into his ear as they took off in pursuit of the blue van.

"Yes, they have turned right," he shouted back, and ignoring a stop sign he swerved recklessly across traffic to turn right.

"I see them!" she cried, crouching on the edge of her seat. "They've turned to the left."

They followed to the left, one wheel of their truck bouncing over a curbstone; they turned right and then left again, motorcycles, scooters and bicycles parting in front of them like the Red Sea, cars screaming to a halt, people racing to the side of the road, her companion huddled over the steering wheel with one hand on the horn, the blue van remaining tantalizingly at a distance. It was a perilous neighborhood in which to give chase because it was the old section of town where people slowly crossed the street, even pausing to gossip until van and truck raced down on them and scattered them. She was aware of street stalls, narrow alleys, open-air markets selling cotton fabrics, baskets, cooking pots, heaps of fish and greens, tiny shops bright with gilt Buddhas, incense, paper flowers, votives, men squatting over sidewalk braziers. Suddenly

they were back on a road that broadened into a boulevard, passing a school, a college, a bridge over the river Ping and a marker on the edge of the road that announced route numbers.

"They're getting away, we're losing them!" she cried, leaning forward. "Can't you go faster?"

He murmured something unintelligible.

"What?"

"My truck, it can't go faster—it's old."

He was right, of course, it had made horrible noises from the very beginning, reducing them both to shouting, but she refused defeat. After all, Cyrus was in that blue van, for what reasons she couldn't conceive, and to lose sight of the van was to lose Cyrus. "Go faster anyway," she begged, biting her lip in frustration. *Faster, faster*, she whispered over and over to herself, but as she whispered her incantations the blue van added a burst of speed and sped around a curve out of sight.

"Damn," she cried, and the man beside her turned his head and gave her a startled glance.

The road narrowed now as they headed north, and having left the outskirts of the city the villas and the thatch houses thinned out and the trees moved in closer to the road. Looking ahead, she realized there would be still more curves as they began climbing toward the hills, and the truck was making fresh sounds of protest as the grade steepened. If Chiang Mai had been higher in altitude than Bangkok she began to understand that even higher altitudes lay ahead, and that the mountains in the hazy distance were precisely where the blue van was heading. It was not a comforting thought.

It was at this moment that Mrs. Pollifax realized the odds against their catching up with the van in this noisy, rattling old truck. It was also the moment when it first occurred to her that she was rushing off into the unknown with a man about whom she knew nothing except that they'd met over a dead body, which was scarcely a recommendation, and her recklessness suddenly appalled her: how could she have done it? It was true that this man had shown a remarkable presence of mind – rather too remarkable, she thought now, uneasily – but he was a complete stranger to her, and she'd certainly joined forces with him very casually and without so much as a thought. No, not casually, she amended: *desperately*. But still, when she considered the circumstances under which she'd met this – this brigand in the *My Fair Lady* hat—there was little doubt that she was traveling with a killer, and with him she was being taken farther and farther away from Chiang Mai. At this thought a new wave of panic swept over her to add weight to her panic over Cyrus.

She forced herself to breathe deeply and to concentrate on objects.

She thought, *The truck rattles, the dashboard is orange with rust, there are hollows in this seat under me as if a dog has been digging for a bone he buried there* . . . Stealing a glance at her companion's profile, she found his face grim but determined, and since she was equally as determined she told herself that whoever he was he seemed as eager as she was to catch up with the blue van and this was what mattered the most just now. After riding in silence for nearly half an hour she cleared her throat and shouted at him, "What do we do if we find the blue van?"

He shrugged. "Do? I have the knife in my pocket."

"It was a strange knife," she shouted back at him. "Made by hand, wasn't it? The handle had string or fishing cord wrapped around the wood."

"Around bamboo," he shouted back. "It was a Shan knife."

A Shan knife. She gave him a startled glance but said nothing—shouting was tiresome and in any case a knife made by Shans seemed no more bizarre to her than her circumstances. Checking her wristwatch, she saw that it was already half past nine and she decided that if they did not spot the blue van again soon she would insist on being taken to a police station. With this thought she opened her purse and checked money and passport; the police would want to see her passport but what would they make of her story, she wondered, and how much dared she tell them? There was also the pressing question she could not avoid it indefinitely—as to whether this man would *allow* her to go to a police station or whether she herself had been made a captive. She returned the passport to the zippered inside pocket of her purse and was appalled to feel the shape and weight of the gold-laden votive concealed there. She thought wildly, *Perhaps I can use it now to ransom Cyrus . . . if this man doesn't rob me first.* To distract her thoughts from such unpleasant speculations she shouted, "Where does this road go?"

"Chiang Rai," he shouted back.

Chiang Rai . . . and they had just left Chiang Mai, which made for rather a lot of Chiangs. She brought out and unfurled the map she'd crumpled into her purse that morning and set out to make sense of where they were going. She found the Chiang Mai they'd left behind them, and moving her finger northward, she discovered the Chiang Rai toward which they were heading, and at the top, near the border, a town called Chiang Saen. Three such Chiangs were almost more than could be dealt with: Mai, Rai and Saen, she repeated to herself, memorizing them, and put the map away with a sigh.

Deprived of conversation she began to examine the countryside through which they were driving, thinking how thrilling it would be if Cyrus were beside her and they were tourists again. They were now in

real country, climbing steadily, with hills rising all around them and jungles of palm and secondary growth on either side. There were no houses: tall grasses lined the road, and beyond them the palms, thick undergrowth and then the jungle. The hills scalloping the horizon looked like cutouts from an ancient Chinese print, as if watercolor had been roughly splashed over their peaks to run raggedly down the sides, leaving an impression of unkempt fur. Up ahead a man suddenly walked out of the tall grass and crossed the road. He wore a blue shirt and pants and a round white shoulder bag that crossed his shoulder to rest against his thigh, a circle of artistic white against the blue. Over his shoulder he carried what looked like a very long thin pointed fishing rod. As they swept past him she turned to look and saw that it was not a fishing rod.

"Was that a rifle?" she shouted at her companion.

"Single-shot—*pern yao*," he shouted back. "Farmers allowed them for hunting here in North."

Watching the man disappear, her head still turned, she saw a motorcycle behind them at some distance and was relieved to find this not quite so lonely a road after all. Nevertheless, having not caught a glimpse of the blue van for a number of miles she decided it was time to confront her companion and demand a police station.

"It's after ten o'clock," she told him, and when he didn't hear her she repeated in a shout, "It's nearly quarter past ten and we've lost the blue van, I want to talk to you!"

"Talk?" He turned and gave her a measuring glance that she found sinister. "Soon," he shouted back, and pointed to a rushing mountain brook on their right. "Stop soon, up ahead."

A mile down the road he slowed the truck and pulled into a clearing. Several other trucks were parked here beside an open thatch-roofed building; beyond, down near the stream of water, stood more huts. The ignition was turned off, the engine gave a last sputter, a gasp, and Mrs. Pollifax could hear again. "Ten minutes," he said, climbing out of the truck.

"But why are you going, and where? We'll lose the van," she cried. She was seeing him full-face again and he looked no less dangerous and intimidating. Perhaps it was the scar, she thought, as well as his bulk, but she found that she preferred the profile that she'd been seeing for the past hour and ten minutes.

"This is Hot Springs Development," he told her. "We may as well use lavatory and pick up food."

"And talk," she reminded him, giving him a hostile glare.

She waited outside the truck while he strolled over to the thatch hut; when he came back he was carrying a wire basket with half a dozen

eggs, a handful of bananas and three bottles of cola. With a jerk of his head he summoned her to follow him down to the mountain stream where a shallow cistern had been placed in the water. To her surprise she saw steam rising in clouds: this really was a hot spring. Lowering the basket of eggs into the cistern, her companion nodded to her and walked away, presumably to a lavatory.

Mrs. Pollifax paced up and down beside the stream and the eggs, feeling that a great deal of time was being wasted and then, deciding to be sensible, she went off in search of a lavatory, too. When she emerged he was waiting, the eggs apparently cooked; he led her to a shaded table, sat down on a bench and handed her a boiled egg.

Fingering it without appetite, she said, "I don't even know your name."

He bowed his head slightly. "Bonchoo."

"Bonchoo what?"

"Well the rest of it is Chalermtkarana," he said dryly, "but we do not bother with two names here. You also have a name?"

"Oh," she said. "Emily Pollifax." Thirsty, she stretched out a hand for one of the colas and took a sip. "Mr. Bonchoo—"

"Just Bonchoo will do."

"All right . . . Bonchoo, we have lost the blue van with my husband inside it and now I wish to be taken to a police station, please, to report this."

He was peeling an egg with expert fingers. "We passed one ten miles back."

"Ten miles " She looked at him, exasperated. "You must realize my husband's been kidnapped, why didn't you stop?"

"We were following the blue van."

"Which is now far ahead of us," she pointed out indignantly. "And for that matter," she added, unleashing all of her uneasiness in a burst of anger, "for that matter why is it that *you* want to follow the blue van? *You* didn't lose a husband."

Bringing out the Shan knife, he sliced his egg neatly and efficiently in half. "This is difficult situation," he said, "and we are losing time. As a good Buddhist is it not possible I wish to gain merit by helping?"

"Well," she snapped, "you can gain merit by taking me now to a police station. They can send out an alert, and find and stop the van."

He said with a shrug, "Maybe so, yes, but I know the men in the blue van—"

"You *know* them?" she gasped.

"You understand not personally," he said, "but since I know where they come from I know where they will go. As for you " He shrugged.

"You go to the police and by the time you explain everything the van will have passed the police check up ahead and will be in Chiang Rai. Also by the time you have explained where and how your husband was kidnapped," he added casually, "and about the dead man you found, it will be *very* late."

He meant, of course, that she was guilty of not reporting Ruamsak's murder at once. *Pure blackmail*, she thought scornfully. "And how would *you* propose to find my husband?"

He said evenly, "I would look for the peoples who drive the van."

"How would you know where to find them?"

"I told you, I know the country where they go."

"How?" she demanded. "Why?"

"Because I live there, I come from the north."

"Did the dead man live in the north, too?" When he didn't reply she said, "You killed him, didn't you?"

He shrugged. "He's dead, does it matter?"

She said angrily, "It matters very much your knowing the men who kidnapped Cyrus and I think you're deliberately delaying my visit to the police so those men in the van can get away. After all, once I tell the police about the murder you'll be the first person they look for, isn't that true?"

He sighed heavily. "You want to know why not the police?"

"I would *love* to know why not the police," she said bitterly. "If, that is, you can possibly find a reason."

He said calmly, peeling another egg, "Because the man who was killed in the house in Chiang Mai was not a nice man. Because the men who took away your husband are not nice men. The police do not always find such men—not here in the north, anyway. And when they look it takes time, much time, and sometimes much—" He hesitated and then said, "much push," but she did not believe that was the word he'd been going to use.

She said abruptly, "And you—are you also not a nice man?"

He said calmly, "Not a nice man at all."

She thought he was deliberately baiting her. "Why were you in Chiang Mai?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I told you, my name is Bonchoo, I went to Chiang Mai with a friend on business, I leave now for home." He looked at her almost with sympathy; certainly he seemed to find her amusing. "But you had better make your choice because I cannot wait, I have waited long enough, the ten minutes passed five minutes ago."

She gave him a furious glance. She was in over her head and she

knew it: she was being asked to trust—or not trust, but accompany—a man who appeared to know a great deal more than she did and who was probably a murderer, which made it impossible to trust him, but if Cyrus had been kidnapped by men who were not—as this Bonchoo put it—*nice* men, then it was possible that a man like Bonchoo really could find Cyrus. What was being suggested was that she ignore conventional avenues of help and continue on with Bonchoo, who was no better than he should be, all on the theory—doubtful, surely—that he knew the men who had abducted Cyrus.

She thought, *Don't be a fool, Emily, go to the police.*

She was remembering Hong Kong now, and the enormous confidence with which she had walked into what had turned out to be a trap, and she was also remembering the consequences. Bonchoo could very well be working for the men in the blue van, and this too could be a trap.

She said accusingly, "You're asking me to trust you?"

He looked astonished. "Trust? Why should you trust me?"

His reply was so reasonable that she gaped at him—what a frustrating rascal he was!—yet at the same time his words shocked her back into her old self with a glimpse of a world that she recognized, a world that she'd entered before, a world without rules, guarantees or trust in anyone but herself, where choices were a gamble, as choices always were, but in this case heavily scored with risk. It was an underground world. If what Bonchoo said was true, then the van and Cyrus were speeding north while she sat here tiresomely debating the character of this man and looking for guarantees.

There were no guarantees. There never had been and there never could be.

She said crisply, "Then let's go." Picking up her purse, hard-boiled eggs, bananas and cola, she added, "But if we can't find the blue van in Chiang Rai then I warn you—I go to the police."

"Who's to stop you?" he said mildly, plucking his last egg from the table and rising.

She gave him one last indignant glance and strode back to the truck. At the long thatch-roofed hut where Bonchoo had purchased food a young man turned his head to watch her. She gave him a brief sidelong glance: a mop of dark hair framing a dark face made darker by his bright red shirt, so young she guessed he was not out of his teens. His companion slouched next to him, his back turned to her, his shirt a bright yellow. Their motorcycle—and this she glanced at admiringly—stood parked beside them.

Joining her in the cab of the truck Bonchoo inserted his key in the ignition and then froze, his eyes fixed on the rearview mirror. He looked

suddenly grim. "I thought they passed us—they *did* pass us, they have come back, the *naklengs*."

"The who?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"The two hoodlums on the motorcycle."

She looked at him in surprise. "Those two boys? Why do they bother you?"

He said evenly, "Because they have been following behind us since Thapae Road in Chiang Mai . . . They take much care to not pass us, which is not so easy with such a motorcycle. I am thinking when they do pass us they plan mischief to us . . ."

CHAPTER 5

In Langley, Virginia, it was evening and Carstairs had stayed late to wrap up the day's work. Bishop had departed for dinner, and for the moment the office was quiet as a different half of the world settled down for the night, although not necessarily to sleep: sudden assassinations would continue and information still be passed discreetly in bistros, pubs and bars but only the most vital calls would be put through to him during the night and he thought that only news from Bashir Ilariyo in the Sudan was likely to curtail or interrupt his sleep.

Since in Thailand it was already Thursday morning he was also expecting confirmation from Mrs. Pollifax that Ruamsak's package was safely in hand, and thinking about this, he took a last sip of coffee and leaned back in his chair, fervently hoping that Ruamsak would prove too clever for McAndrews, who had been assigned the job of surveillance. It seemed to him a crude mistake to attempt identification of Ruamsak, and he failed to understand Mornajay's obsession about this. Ruamsak had already proved valuable and it was difficult getting information these days about the situation in the north of Thailand. The CIA office in Bangkok had slipped badly, devoting its time mainly to feeding data into computers, as witness McAndrews the computer expert. The Drug Enforcement Agency — DEA — worked in the north and shared pertinent information but their reports usually concerned the politics of drug smuggling, and who was who among the warlords and drug merchants. He thought of the years that Jacoby had sent them information from Chiang Saen; the department knew, of course, that he had a drug problem but according to Ruamsak the man was entering the terminal stages of opium addiction and, what was worse, to support his habit he was selling information to the Vietnamese in Laos as well as to the CIA. Ruamsak had also thrown doubt on the accuracy of that information. He

had written: *I am seeing copies of what he sends to you, they are not right, sir, he changes truth. This I know for I am one who brings to him the news he sells you.* Ruamsak had gone on to correct the misinformation that Jacoby had sent and this had been enlightening, to say the least.

In the adjacent room a door opened and closed and he glanced up to see Bishop beaming at him, his sheepskin jacket dusted with snow. "Thought you might still be here," he said cheerfully. "Stopped in to see—"

He waited because a red light had surfaced on the phone box, followed by a quiet buzz, and Carstairs picked up the receiver. Into the phone he said, "Carstairs here." To Bishop he said, "To see what?"

"See what you've heard from our friend Mrs. P . . . she's checked in okay?"

Carstairs gestured to him to sit down. "Perfect timing, Betsy reports a call from Chiang Mai coming through right now."

"Wonderful," said Bishop, and sat down and picked up the extension, smiling in anticipation. His smile faded as he heard the voice that came on the line; it was not Mrs. Pollifax, it was a man's voice, piercing and distraught, and it was saying, "I was given this number to call if my name's McAndrews, sir, and—"

Bishop experienced a sinking sensation in his stomach. He thought, *Something's gone wrong.*

Carstairs reached over to switch on a machine and record this. Interrupting the rush of words, he said sharply, "Pull yourself together, McAndrews, I can't understand what you're saying, you seem to be babbling about a body?"

"Yes, yes, body," repeated McAndrews frantically. "Sir, I've never been in such a situation before, and I can't reach "

Body, thought Bishop, suddenly very still.

"Breathe deeply," counseled Carstairs. "Better still, begin at the beginning. You were assigned two people to follow in Chiang Mai, a man and a woman, right?"

At the other end McAndrews could be heard taking deep breaths, and they waited patiently. "Yes, sir," he said at last. "Except it didn't but to begin at the beginning, sir, I followed them to this place on Thapae Road. That was an hour ago, it's not quite nine in the morning here."

"And?"

"Well, the lady went down this alley while the gentleman Mr. Reed, is it?—stopped to admire a jug—"

"A what?"

"Water jug, sir. Large water jug outside a lacquer shop. So I waited,

thinking he'd join his wife or she'd join him in a few minutes but these two men walk up to Mr. Reed and start talking, very pleasantly, too—"

"American?"

"No, Thai. And although I could see that Mr. Reed wanted to pull away they just kept talking with him, and then suddenly he sagged—only word for it, sir, a big man like that. The two men catch him and sort of pull and drag him across the street to a van, which took a while, what with the size of him, and all the traffic, and just as they're trying to get him into the rear of the van—to take him off to a hospital, I thought—his wife came out of the alley, screamed 'Cyrus!' and the men slammed the doors shut, hopped in and took off."

Carstairs said sharply, "Was Reed conscious or unconscious? What condition was he in?"

"Dopey at first, unconscious by the time they reached the van."

Under his breath Carstairs began swearing. "Go on."

"Yes . . . Well, the lady's in the middle of the street, cars stopping and people shouting, and this chap who followed her out of the alley—"

"What chap? She was with someone?"

"Yes, and he takes her by the arm, pulls her to a truck and they hop in and take off after the van."

Carstairs gritted his teeth. "And you did what? McAndrews, are you calling to tell me—"

"That's it, sir," groaned McAndrews. "My own car was parked too far down the street, very discreetly, you understand, so by the time I got to it both the truck and the van were gone. I drove up and down streets looking for them but there was no sign of them so I came back and parked the car and went down the alley to take a look at where the lady had gone, and there was this hut, and—" His voice broke.

"Yes, yes," Carstairs said impatiently.

"That's where I found it."

"Found what?"

"The body, sir. The only occupant of the house was—is—a dead man, Thai or Chinese, on the floor with a knife wound in his ribs and his body still warm."

"Good God," Carstairs said, his mind racing ahead to form pictures of Mrs. Pollifax either committing a murder or witnessing a murder.

In a rage, Bishop flung himself out of his chair and began pacing back and forth. *The fool*, he thought furiously, *any fool would have realized that Reed was being kidnapped, not taken to a hospital, and any fool would have made a dash for his car—if he'd been so stupid as to not have it nearby and ready . . . Christ!*

"What you do next," Carstairs said evenly, "is find them, McAn-

drews. Check the hospitals and see if anyone answering Reed's description has been brought in, which I doubt very much, but it's the first thing to establish. Then go back to Thapae Road and question people, see if anyone can identify the two men who carried off Reed, or if anyone recognized the man with Reed's wife. There must have been dozens of witnesses, see if you can find out what happened to Reed, what made him collapse . . . I suspect a hypodermic needle . . . Don't call in the police yet, get facts."

"Yes, sir. I'm terribly sorry, sir."

"Done much surveillance before, McAndrews?" he inquired in a silky voice.

"No, sir, only in training. This is my first job."

Carstairs looked appalled. "I see . . . well . . ." He sighed. "Since you're already on the scene and know the cast of characters there's no point in bringing in anyone more experienced just now. Report back to me, McAndrews, and try to remember we're pinning all our hopes on you. *Find* them!"

He hung up and met Bishop's blazing eyes. "Pinning all our hopes on him!" exploded Bishop. "The man's obviously a klutz and you know you know damn well what I told Mrs. Pollifax, I told her I assured her—they've *both* disappeared now!"

"Gently, Bishop."

"Gently, hell," snarled Bishop. "Are you forgetting Hong Kong? I told both of them this was a simple courier operation, I gave them my word just pick up the package and—what are you doing?"

Carstairs had picked up the phone. He said, "Just because I'm not having a tantrum, Bishop, doesn't mean that I'm any less enraged than you. This was Mornajay's inspiration, and it's Mornajay's head that I'd like on a platter. Betsy, connect me with Upstairs . . . Mornajay's office, Southeast Asia division, and if he's left I want to know precisely where to contact him."

"That's more like it," Bishop said with feeling, and stopped pacing and sat down. He listened to Carstairs, suave and courteous now as he spoke with Mornajay's assistant and asked where Mornajay could be reached. There was a pause and then Carstairs said firmly, "But I must reach him, Mrs. Hudson. You were at the conference last Saturday night the Ruamsak affair so you'll know why I need to talk to him when I tell you that all hell seems to have broken loose over there, and—what?"

Carstairs looked startled. "Don't know *what*? Yes, of course I'll wait . . ." He hung up, looking puzzled. "Put some coffee on, Bishop, she's coming down here."

Bishop was equally as startled. "For pete's sake why?"

Carstairs was frowning. "I don't know, but she says she can't tell me where to reach Mornajay and she sounds upset."

Bishop went out to his office and reheated stale coffee and when Mrs. Hudson arrived he ushered her in to Carstairs and handed her a cup of the brew.

"Thank you," she said, placing it on the desk but making no move to touch it.

She was a plump and capable woman with sandy hair worn in a bun, a no-nonsense person famous for her efficiency; now Bishop was astonished to see tears in her eyes.

"I simply haven't known what to do," she was saying in an anguished voice, "and I simply have to tell someone, Mr. Carstairs. Mr. Mornajay has absolutely disappeared and I haven't seen him since Monday. He left the office in the middle of a ten o'clock appointment—just walked out and never came back. I've been doing everything possible to cover for him—lying, working nights to keep up, stalling people . . . I've checked all the hospitals, Mr. Carstairs, I've even contacted Minneapolis, where he still has an aunt living."

And this is Wednesday evening, realized Bishop, jarred by her disclosure.

Carstairs was frowning. "This certainly doesn't sound like Mornajay, he's not done this before, has he?"

"Never," she said passionately. "Always at his desk, except for his vacations, and I've worked with him for thirteen years now. I feel I can trust you with this, and frankly I need help, he's got to be found!"

Carstairs looked puzzled, his fingers tapping the desk as he considered what could only be a bombshell in Bishop's estimation. He said quietly, "Tell me about Monday morning, Mrs. Hudson."

"Yes, of course," she said.

"You say he left in the middle of an appointment?"

She nodded. "I've gone over and over it, Mr. Carstairs. There was a phone call that he accepted, in spite of that appointment, and soon after that he simply walked out without explanation. It was a phone call from Bangkok."

Carstairs's eyebrows shot up. "Bangkok! Any idea who from?"

"Yes, from a woman named Chin-Ling."

"Someone he's in regular contact with?"

She shook her head. "You mean an operative—no, the name's not one of ours, I've looked into that. I remember her name very clearly because I told her he was busy, tied up with an appointment. She said it was terribly important and begged me to tell him that Chin-Ling was calling,

so I did, and I must confess I was surprised he said he'd talk to her at once."

"And it was after this that he left? How long did he and Chin-Ling talk?"

"I suppose that would be important, yes. Let's see . . ." She closed her eyes, thinking back. "I'd guess about five minutes but there'd be a record of it down at switchboard."

At this moment Bishop would have given a week's wages to know what Carstairs was thinking and how much of his reaction he would share. Carstairs was a man who operated on intuition as well as logic; it was what made him special. For himself, he was baffled as to what could possibly lead to Mornajay's mysterious disappearance. He was certainly not a man given to whimsical impulses or to any spontaneity at all; he was a man who seemed to have no private life and to live totally for his work.

Bishop listened to Carstairs quietly tell Mrs. Hudson that he would use his contacts discreetly to locate Mornajay, that she was not to worry, that he was glad she had told him of Mornajay's disappearance and that he would not betray her confidence. When she had left, Carstairs gave Bishop a long and thoughtful glance. He said, grimly, "This is completely out of character for Mornajay."

Bishop nodded and reached for the cup of coffee that Mrs. Hudson had left untouched.

There followed a long silence and then abruptly Carstairs snapped his fingers. Picking up the phone, he asked to be put through to Bangkok, to the U.S. Embassy first, and then to the CIA, which occupied an office in the same building. Since the phone in Bishop's office was buzzing he did not hear what happened next; when he returned, Carstairs was sitting at his desk staring at his desk blotter.

"I surprised them very much," Carstairs told him with a strange little smile. "Neither the Embassy nor the CIA have any knowledge of Mornajay being in Bangkok. They wondered why he would be."

Bishop said in astonishment, "You think *that's* where he is?"

"He had that call from Bangkok," mused Carstairs. "If he's not at work in his office, not hit by a car and in the hospital, not in his apartment and not in Minneapolis—" He stopped, adding thoughtfully, "He spent nearly ten years in Thailand during the Vietnam War, you know."

Bishop said bitterly, "Lining up people like McAndrews?"

Carstairs gave him a long and interested look. "Exactly . . . Now while I sign these last papers and file them, Bishop, put me through to Bangkok again, will you? This time to a place on Patpong Road called the Indiana 500." Seeing Bishop's face, he added kindly, "A bar where

expatriates and foreign newsmen hang out. I want to speak to the owner, Chuck Holloway."

"Right, sir."

The call and the connection came through quickly and Bishop frankly eavesdropped. He heard Carstairs and Holloway greet each other cordially, and following a few inquiries about business at the Indiana 500 booming but not like in the old days—he heard Carstairs ask if Holloway remembered Lance Mornajay.

Holloway laughed. "Who could forget him? Mr. Know-It-All we called him. How could I forget a guy who always had to tell me how to fix a margarita? Sure, I remember the guy."

Carstairs asked if by any chance he'd seen Mornajay recently. *Ridiculous*, thought Bishop, and then his jaw dropped as Chuck Holloway said, "Sure, he was in here just last night. I didn't speak to him, he was with another guy, and in heavy conference over in a corner, you know? Here about—not long, maybe forty minutes. Late last night it was, *very* late."

Bishop thought that even Carstairs sounded startled at this news. "We're talking about the same man, you're certain?" he asked.

"Sure I'm certain. Haven't seen Mornajay for a long time but the same mop of curly gray hair and cold blue eyes, and damned if the barmaid didn't say he ordered a margarita. Cold as ice and an ego a mile wide, that man."

"That's Mornajay," Carstairs said, and "Thanks, Chuck, keep this under your hat, will you?"

"You bet."

So Mornajay was in Bangkok, thought Bishop, staggered by this information. As Carstairs hung up Bishop shook his head and said, "What on God's green earth is Mornajay doing over there -strictly on the sly— when he has operatives and field men to do the work?"

Carstairs said slowly, "Totally out of character, which makes it *very* interesting, don't you think?"

"Not to me," Bishop said, scowling. "Does he know who you sent to Chiang Mai to pick up Ruamsak's package?"

Carstairs shook his head. "Only a nameless man and woman from our courier list."

"So he hasn't gone to rescue Emily and Cyrus."

Carstairs gave a short bark of a laugh. "Scarcely, no. But he's *there*, Bishop."

Bishop nodded.

"And he *shouldn't* be there." Carstairs frowned. "I don't like it, Bishop. I don't like the sound of it and I don't like the smell of it either." He added grimly, "In the space of a few hours we've lost Mrs. Pollifax,

we've lost Cyrus, and in all probability it was Ruamsak dead in that hut, and now one of our top men Upstairs gives every evidence of having gone berserk."

"Trouble," Bishop said flatly, and sighed.

CHAPTER 6

MRS. POLLIFAX, HEARING THAT A MOTORCYCLE HAD KEPT PACE with them since Thapae Road, wondered if she believed Bonchoo. She could see no reason why they should be followed, and in spite of their brief conference she couldn't fathom Bonchoo's motives; there remained any number of scenarios that could explain him and she disliked almost all of them. There might have been an amused glint in his eye back at the hot springs—and humor implied intelligence—but she had met her share of thoroughly wicked people who were intelligent and sometimes even humorous. She thought Bonchoo very adroit at concealing himself, and no matter how she tried to overlook the scar across his face it continued to suggest a life of violence. Worse, he'd made no attempt to reassure her, and had already admitted that he was no better than the men who had stolen Cyrus.

Nevertheless his suspicions about the two men on the motorcycle left her uneasy and after they had driven a mile or two at their slow and stately pace she found herself turning her head to look at the road behind them, and it was proof of her unease that she turned her head very slowly and carefully.

The motorcycle was behind them again. And motorcycles, she reflected, did not customarily drive at thirty-five miles an hour, and hang back from passing. Giving Bonchoo a sharp glance, she said, "Friends of yours?" and was immediately sorry that she'd said this because she discovered him looking intensely worried, an expression she'd not seen on his face before, and since she was worried too it gave them something in common. When he didn't reply to her flippant remark she shouted at him, "How far now to Chiang Rai?"

"One and one half hours," he shouted back, and returned to his thoughts, which were obviously dark ones.

She was certain by now that some unidentifiable metal object must have been tossed into the engine to produce the groans and rattles that made conversation exhausting. She occupied herself by turning her head every few minutes to check the motorcycle's presence behind them, and behind them it remained, the splash of red shirt reappearing after every curve in the road, and always at the same distance behind them. Her watch told her that it was a quarter to eleven now; for half an hour she continued doing this, aware that beside her Bonchoo's eyes also strayed frequently to his rearview mirror. They reached a small plateau, passing rice paddies and two thatch-roofed houses. A woman carrying baskets on a pole across her shoulders walked toward them across the fields – she was glimpsed and then she was gone—and the road began climbing again through the forest.

They had driven for another fifteen minutes in silence when Bonchoo suddenly shouted to her in an agonized voice, "I am going to stop, they follow behind us like *fahrawng*—thunderclouds! It puts butterflies in my stomach."

"Stop?" she repeated doubtfully. "But why?"

"I must!" He looked really upset.

"But they stay behind us," she shouted back at him. He was slowing the truck, its rattles subsiding; she thought he was choosing a very poor place to honor his butterflies because the road was alarmingly empty and the forests on either side dense. "What if they stop, too?" she asked.

"I have to find out," he cried. "If they are after us like bandits they will stop us anyway, soon or late, and it will be in a place *they* choose."

She nodded; this she could understand. "What do you suggest doing?"

"There is a monkey wrench there," he said, pointing under her seat. "A big one."

She leaned over and brought it out as he steered the truck to the side of the road. When he turned off the engine the silence was so startling that it fairly screamed at her.

"Stay," he said, taking the monkey wrench from her and opening the door beside him. "I am going into the bushes – they'll think for the usual reason. You'll be safe in the truck. Lock the doors and stay."

He slid out of the truck and a second later vanished into the dusty vines and tangles along the road, a few low palms quivering behind him. Mrs. Pollifax thought it gallant of him to insist that she remain in the truck and she thought the better of him for it, but she could not feel that being confined between a door and a gearshift would prove very interesting. If what Bonchoo suspected was true then she certainly didn't relish watching two young men descend upon Bonchoo in the forest, out-

numbering him. It seemed pertinent to her own future to lighten the odds and become a presence on the scene.

She stepped out of the truck just as the motorcycle overtook them. It slowed to a stop, which was either Samaritan-like or ominous, except that after a glance at the dark and hostile faces of the two young men she decided that it was ominous. Mrs. Pollifax nodded politely to them and strolled around the truck to kick a tire, observing them discreetly as she pretended concern for the tire. The two men exchanged words in Thai, laughed, climbed off the motorcycle, pushed down the kickstand and strolled to the edge of the road. Peering into the woods, they exchanged more words and then Red Shirt parted the shrubbery and went in after Bonchoo, leaving the other man at the edge of the road to watch him disappear and to wait.

So Bonchoo was right, she thought, her heart beginning to beat faster, her adrenaline glands on the alert. She casually walked over to join the man at the edge of the road. "Good morning," she said conversationally. "Perhaps you can tell me how far it is to Chiang Rai now?"

He turned and gave her an impatient glance. He didn't reply and she thought his eyes held an unhealthy joy as he stood and waited. With a shrug he turned back to the forest, and Mrs. Pollifax retreated several paces behind him and waited, too. Presently there came a cry, a scuffle, a grunt followed by a groan, a voice shouting, and Red Shirt's companion stiffened and took a step forward. He had overlooked Mrs. Pollifax, however, who had already assumed the basic stance that her instructor Lorvale called *hachiji-dachi*. Lifting her right arm, hand open, she struck the back of the man's neck with a quick decisive karate slash that sent him sprawling unconscious to the ground.

There was a thrashing of dried grass and Bonchoo leaped out of the bushes, knife in one hand, monkey wrench in the other, a bloody gash across his scarred cheek. He came to a halt, gaping at the young man lying at her feet. "But what happened?" he gasped.

She said calmly, "I hit him."

"You?" He looked from the man on the ground to Mrs. Pollifax and his mouth dropped open. "You—are you a witch?"

"Karate, brown belt," she said crisply. "What about the other one?"

"Knocked out with the monkey wrench but he was a tough one. He is still breathing, thank God, or I would have lost much merit." He sank down on a rock and put his head in his hands and to her surprise she saw that he was trembling. "I—Bonchoo," he groaned. "To say Bonchoo is scared—*mai dai*, not good. This is not an auspicious day for me!"

He suddenly seemed surprisingly human to her. She could sympathize with him—it was not an auspicious day for either of them—but

she could be sympathetic only to a modest level. She said accusingly, "If they belong to the men who kidnapped Cyrus they should have gone after *me* but they didn't, they wanted to kill *you*, Bonchoo. Why?"

He was not listening. He struck his forehead with a fist. "I didn't see, I didn't know there is one smart man behind this, and me, I am amateur."

"Well, I'm not," she told him sharply.

He glanced up at her and then at the man lying unconscious on the ground; he said dryly, "No—no, you are not amateur and this I do not understand either."

"Who is the 'smart man' behind this?" she demanded.

He shook his head. "He was crafty as a *naga* to send *gawng john* after me."

"I do think we should get out of here," Mrs. Pollifax pointed out. "We're supposed to be following the blue van, we have to catch up with Cyrus!"

He said gloomily, "I can scarcely help you look for this Cyrus if I am dead."

"But you're not dead," she reminded him matter-of-factly. "Why do they want to kill you, and who is *gawng john*?"

Bonchoo stirred, sighed and straightened his shoulders. "It means guerrilla band, robber gang, not a person." He stood up and looked around, removed his hat and scratched his head, revealing the fact that he was nearly bald, which gave him even more of a brigand look. "I do not like this," he announced.

"Nor do I," said Mrs. Pollifax. "We can't leave this—this hoodlum and his motorcycle here," she pointed out.

"No," he said, and they regarded each other measuringly. "You are not scared?"

"At the moment I'm more 'scared' for Cyrus," she told him. "Do you think, please, we could get to work now before they wake up?"

"Yes," he said, jammed his hat squarely back on his head and rose to his feet.

Together they lifted Yellow Shirt and half-carried, half-dragged him into the underbrush to place next to his companion. The motorcycle was wheeled into the jungle a little farther down the road, a handful of sand and leaves was dropped into its gas tank, and while Mrs. Pollifax waited for him in the cab Bonchoo carefully rearranged bent saplings and twisted palms to conceal their invasion of the forest.

"Feeling better?" she asked as he joined her.

He gave her a rueful smile. "I guess." Climbing in beside her, he started the engine and they were off again.

But something had subtly changed between them: each of them had become slightly more of a person to the other now, bringing interesting new dimensions to their thinking. Having proceeded on the uneasy basis of appearances, and a need for expediency, they were now more aware of what lay behind the other's facades: Bonchoo had openly admitted to being afraid, which surprised her and rendered him less threatening, while Bonchoo was finding her not quite the stereotype of Helpless American that he'd assumed. Mrs. Pollifax found herself going back over the scene in the Chiang Mai hut and applying friendlier aspects to it: he might have killed Ruamsak but the fact that he had not abandoned her so far struck her now as an aspect of character rather than ominous. She thought that her instincts might have been sound after all when she had decided to accept Bonchoo and to continue on with him. Nevertheless it was becoming very important to break down his defenses soon and learn who the crafty *naga* might be who was behind the near-killing on the road. In the meantime she gazed thoughtfully out of the window at the road, at groves of bamboo rising in graceful columns, at a bald hilltop glimpsed in the distance that was planted with tiny new trees in rows like stripes of chenille across a brown cloth. A tiny bus charged down upon them at breakneck speed and was gone. Up ahead she saw a car that had stalled beside the edge of the road and she leaned forward, frowning. She said, "Bonchoo, isn't that—?" and then, "It's blue!" she cried. "Bonchoo, look—it's a van, a blue van!"

Bonchoo was already slowing the truck. "Yes!" he shouted back.

From a distance it looked as if the car had run off the road into a ditch, except there were no ditches along the road. It leaned crazily to one side as if an axle had broken, or a wheel had been lost but there it was, shabby, old and unmistakably blue. She felt a flare of excitement.

Bonchoo cautiously drove past the van and then turned around and drove back and parked behind it. "Empty," he said.

"Yes, but Cyrus could still be in the back," she told him. "If they've had to abandon the van and walk—" Her heart was singing. "They could scarcely take an unconscious man with them, could they? Wouldn't they have to walk?" Without waiting for a reply she flung open the door and was out of the truck and running, with Bonchoo hurrying behind her. She opened the van's door and peered inside. Her hopeful heart constricted: Cyrus was not inside, the rear was empty.

"He's not here," she said, tears rising in her eyes. "He's gone, they took him with them, but where?"

Bonchoo looked thoughtful. "I do not think they walk along this road if they have stolen a man, not with a police block half an hour from here." At her startled glance he said, "Oh yes, we are in the north now,

where police set up barriers to check for smugglers and insurgents. So long as they drive in a car they would have a good story for the police, but to walk, with this Cyrus between them " He shook his head.

"I wish you'd stop calling him 'this Cyrus,' " she said indignantly. "He was simply minding his own business, an innocent bystander carried off by unscrupulous people."

Bonchoo looked at her with interest. "Was he?" he said softly. "You know no reason for this kidnapping?"

"Certainly not," she said hotly.

He smiled a little. "You are crying."

"I'm not crying," she flung at him. "But if they didn't start walking along the road where would they go?"

Bonchoo's gaze shifted to the forest. "There," he said, and pointed.

She turned and looked at what he pointed to: at the dense forest, and at level after level of dusty green rising beyond its edge. "There?" she said blankly. "But—that's jungle."

"There are trails."

"Where?"

"Not far if we are now less than one hour from Chiang Rai." He glanced up at the sun and then at the road and then at the shape of the hills around them. "Very near," he said, and strolling past the blue van, he began examining the scrub along the shoulder of the road. "Here," he called out suddenly, pointing. "But not easy, it can be dangerous."

"If you think that's where they went then it's where I go, even by myself," she added defiantly.

He laughed. "You? By yourself? You'd be lost in an hour. Decide! Those two young *naklengs* will soon be sitting up and rubbing two sore heads."

"You mean you'll go too, Bonchoo? To—" She hesitated. "To gain merit?"

"I have much merit to earn," he said, nodding, but she thought he looked amused again. "*Much!* Okay we go, but first we hide these cars, too."

It proved impossible to move the blue van, even to roll it over, and so it was left where it stood by the side of the road, which pleased neither of them because it would be seen at once by the *naklengs*. Bonchoo's truck, however, was driven some distance down the road where it was carefully concealed behind a grove of bamboo trees and divested of eggs, bananas and colas, which they divided between their pockets and her purse.

Following this, they approached the trail, leaving behind them—Mrs.

Pollifax counted one motorcycle, one truck, one blue van and two young men who might or might not be pursuing them soon.

"Here," Bonchoo said, showing her the path almost obscured from the road by scrub and bushes.

Mrs. Pollifax regarded it doubtfully; she'd not expected the trail to look so dark and forbidding, it was no more than a thread of tamped-down earth winding among towering trees and, worse, it soon slanted upward at a sharp angle. She glanced ruefully at the flimsy cotton shoes she'd chosen this morning, just because they matched her khaki slacks, and sighed over such vanity. Seeing a torn piece of paper next to her right shoe, she automatically picked it up, glanced at it curiously and found herself staring in shock at a slip of paper on which was etched the blue eye of a fish —one eye, one fin—and under it the letters D-I-N-E-S.

"Sardines!" she cried. "Cyrus dropped this! Bonchoo, it's his!"

Bonchoo came to her side and looked at it, puzzled. "He dropped this? What is it? How can you know?"

"It's torn from a tin of sardines—he carried them in his camera bag—it's a message! This is where they went, and he's conscious and *alive*!"

"A very strange message," he said doubtfully.

"Trust me," she told him eagerly, and at once the narrow path no longer looked forbidding. "They haven't harmed him, he must be walking now, and this is where they went!"

"*Very* strange message," Bonchoo repeated, shaking his head.

Brushing aside dusty palm leaves and vines, he held them back for her and with this they left behind the road to Chiang Rai and plunged into the jungle.

CHAPTER 7

IT WAS A GREEN AND CLAUSTROPHOBIC WORLD THEY ENTERED. Close to the road every leaf and stem was red with dust that rose in clouds as they passed; a few hundred feet inside and they left both dust and road behind them, as well as every evidence of civilization, so that only the thought of Cyrus passing this way steadied Mrs. Pollifax. The vegetation was dense: columns of trees climbed skyward, but at ground level scrub and scraggly new growth formed a wall on either side of the narrow trail, rising out of tangles of dried grass and palms and bamboo that struggled toward the sun. There was no sky: the foliage of the trees met and formed an arch overhead, turning the trail into a tunnel where only an occasional stripe of sunshine broke through to pattern the forest floor.

Bonchoo led the way. The stillness of the forest struck her at first as oppressive until a bird suddenly cried out overhead, and as it took flight she saw a flash of bright color high among the treetops. Leaves rustled and quivered at the bird's departure and then the forest became still again, but she felt a listening quality about it now, a sense of presences. As she trudged along behind Bonchoo she became aware that sometimes, far above them, trees stirred and leaves danced, and at such times a sweeter air drifted down to her but no breezes followed: on the forest floor it remained warm, humid, with a faint odor of earth and decaying roots.

"Are there snakes?" she called to Bonchoo.

She was becoming familiar now with his shrug. Over his shoulder he said, "Not so many as down on the plains, it's not as hot in the mountains. They come out only at night here."

It was a reply that was not entirely reassuring.

Occasionally the wall on either side thinned and if she removed her

eyes from the trail, which increasingly hypnotized her, she saw clearings where a great tree had fallen, creating sun and space for new shoots of green to take root, where tiny white flowers grew over and around the fallen trunk. But presently her glance stopped wandering because they began to climb again, the path moving up toward the ridges that she'd seen from the road. Bonchoo was a fast walker: determined to keep up with him she tried not to notice that after half an hour she had begun to pant. She was also growing hungry and she was tiring but most of all she was thirsty. Stealing a glance at her watch, she saw that it was nearing noon, which gave her hope that soon Bonchoo might halt his relentless pace and consider rest and some food.

Steadily they marched along until they emerged from woods into a clearing covered with tall imperata grass; they had reached the summit of this particular hill, and looking ahead she saw they must next walk downhill for perhaps half a mile and then climb to a still higher hill. She sighed. "Are there wild animals?"

He turned to her. "Not many. Deer, a few bears. You are afraid?" he asked, looking at her seriously.

"I just like to know what to expect," she told him, adding, "I'm thirsty, can we stop now?"

"When we reach the next ridge," he said, pointing. "There has been a fire there, as you can see, and we will be able to see ahead and behind us."

He meant, of course, that the two *naklengs* might already be following them but she did not care to think about that. She gave the ridge a hostile glance and fell into step behind Bonchoo again. Reentering the forest, she caught a glimpse of another brilliant-plumaged bird and wondered if Cyrus might have seen it, too, bird-watcher that he was, but it was not time to think of Cyrus, either. She still held in her hand the slip of paper with the fish eye and the letters D-I-N-E-S that was all of Cyrus that she possessed now but she sternly told herself it would only sap her flagging energy to go over and over why he had been abducted, and what those people wanted of him, and having sternly told herself not to think about this she at once began wondering why he'd been abducted and what those people wanted of him, whoever they were . . .

Whoever they were . . . This was what she had to find out from Bonchoo when they reached the next ridge and rested. Cyrus had been mysteriously carried off, Ruamsak was dead in Chiang Mai and the only man who could explain any of this strode along the trail in front of her, his own life apparently in danger for reasons unknown to her. Presently she glanced at her watch again the two men who had tried to kill Bonchoo would have found the blue van parked at the side of the

road and if they remained determined to kill Bonchoo they would guess where they had gone, and follow.

For just a moment, her tiredness bringing an odd detachment, she saw herself and Bonchoo in pursuit of Cyrus somewhere ahead of them, and the two *naklengs* possibly giving chase behind them, and here she was, Emily Reed-Pollifax, in a jungle in northern Thailand, hurrying along behind a man she scarcely knew. Her thoughts went back to a sunny kitchen and Bishop saying, "It's a very small errand, just pick up a package for us . . ." She was appalled at his naïvete and his miscalculations angered her now, she admitted it.

But the horror of the situation, and what kept her trudging after Bonchoo in spite of growing exhaustion was why Cyrus had been taken, what they wanted of him and what they would do to him when they learned he was of no use to them. And she did not even know who "they" were, and such helplessness was always enraging. She glanced up into the thick unruly wall of trees groping toward sky and sunlight and suddenly the forest seemed a very sinister place to her. To watch the trail was kinder, and she lowered her eyes, shook her head, sighed, gritted her teeth and walked on, one step after another, feet hurting now, legs trembling from walking downhill and then uphill, and thirsty.

"Almost there," Bonchoo said.

She lifted her eyes: they had come out on the ridge and had reached the clearing which had begun greening over with soft tender grass.

"Slash-and-burn," Bonchoo told her. "A rice or poppy field once for the hill people—until the earth grew tired." He led her across the field to its far edge and she sank down gratefully on a rock shaded by the forest ahead.

"Something to drink, please," she said.

He handed her a lukewarm cola. "Not too fast," he warned her. "We have two bottles left, and you you being *farang* you must not drink water."

"It's lovely, it's so *wet*," she said, licking her lips.

"We stop for fifteen minutes only. Eat," he said, and handed her a hard-boiled egg.

She was reviving; just to sit was glorious, and putting down the cola, she began to peel the egg. Glancing at Bonchoo, seated cross-legged on the grass, she said, "It's time you talk, Bonchoo . . . those men wanted to kill you and I want to know why."

He nodded cheerfully. "Yes, and you chop-chopped the second one, which saved my life. I am grateful—much merit for you!"

"Grateful enough," she said dryly, "to explain this—this cast of characters I've been thrown among? I mean, all I did was walk into a hut

with bougainvillea over its fence and now I've lost a husband, and here I am on a jungle hilltop with you."

He nodded judiciously. "That is true, yes . . . okay," he said, and thought a minute. "I will tell you a story."

"Yes, tell me a story," she urged.

He took a deep breath. "To begin, I live in Chiang Saen, where lives also my friend Ruamsak, who needed help from me."

She was careful not to react to his naming Ruamsak. "That's the town up on the border?" she asked coolly.

He nodded. "Yes. There is also this American there who calls himself Jacoby, which may or may not be his name."

"Jacoby," she repeated—*and Ruamsak*, she added to herself triumphantly, feeling that at last a connection was being made that she could understand.

"When there were Americans here," Bonchoo said, "this Jacoby came with the CIA but he got into drugs and when the Americans left Thailand in '76 he stayed. In Chiang Saen there are always drugs, you understand? Because in Mae Sai and Chiang Saen well, that is the Golden Triangle, as it is called. So he stayed there in a guesthouse."

She nodded and watched him efficiently slice his egg with the murder knife.

"But this Jacoby," he went on, "would still pass information to his CIA people in the U.S.A. Drugs are cheap in Chiang Saen when a man is not a drug agent and can be trusted, but drugs still need money to buy. Sometimes, with my connections, I would hear things and tell Jacoby; I would earn some *baht* from him in that way and he would earn some U.S. dollars for his opium. He still had that U.S. connection I knew about that, when he was smoking opium he would boast of it to me."

Bonchoo sighed. "It is important never to trust people who smoke opium, this I know, so I was very careful. I did not trust Jacoby, I did not trust the few friends he had, I only trusted his *baht*."

"Very sensible," agreed Mrs. Pollifax.

He shrugged. "So when my friend Ruamsak comes to me to ask how he can sell big information he has big political information –I ask myself how this could be delivered without Jacoby taking all the money. But only Jacoby knows what to do, so finally I have to go to him and speak of Ruamsak; I tell him Ruamsak will share money but not information, which is political in nature. Of course Jacoby tries to find out who Ruamsak is and what he knows but this I refuse." He stopped and added very seriously, "It had something to do with a coup planned soon in my country."

"Oh," said Mrs. Pollifax, startled. "But—how would this Ruamsak know?"

"Because Ruamsak travels many places," said Bonchoo solemnly.

"Why?" asked Mrs. Pollifax. "How?"

"He is a smuggler. He is a smuggler of teak."

"Of *what*?"

"Oh yes. Teak is not legal to cut now in my country, there are laws against it, the government is busy with programs to grow new teak before it's all gone. So Ruamsak goes into Burma—" He pointed toward the mountain range behind them. "He buys teak logs and floats them down the Mekong at night to sell on the black market. When he goes back into Burma he takes spare auto parts, lipsticks, radios, flashlights. Sometimes he smuggles things across the Mekong into Laos, too—he goes many places and hears many things."

"All right, I understand," she said, nodding.

"So Ruamsak I trust but not Jacoby. Jacoby makes arrangements, he tells me Ruamsak is to go to Chiang Mai to meet a person who will come to him there. I am suspicious and decide I follow my friend Ruamsak to make sure it's all okay."

He leaned forward, waving his knife. "And I am wise to not trust Jacoby, you see how he betrays Ruamsak. He sets a trap to kill him. Jacoby is in very bad shape from his opium smoking so I think he turned to the only people he knows now: the men he buys his drugs from." Bonchoo shivered. "Wen Sa's men."

Mrs. Pollifax, about to bite into an egg, paused.

"And who is Wen Sa?"

Bonchoo lowered his voice. "Please, it is not a name to speak loudly. He is general of the biggest rebel army in Burma, a Shan warlord. He also controls most of the opium trade, a dangerous man. They say he comes often into this country in disguise, just comes and goes."

Astonished, she said, "But if he's that big, why on earth would he pay any attention to Jacoby? Why should he help an American who's a drug addict?"

Bonchoo scowled. "I think and think about this since we left Chiang Mai. He would help Jacoby only if Jacoby told him something clever and sly. I think Jacoby must have lied to him and told Wen Sa's men that Ruamsak learned where opium refineries are hidden in the jungle . . . Americans are very interested in this; your people spend millions to help the Thai police stamp out opium. Why else would Wen Sa's men follow Ruamsak to Chiang Mai and kill him? They are not interested in political information."

Mrs. Pollifax frowned. "So it was one of Wen Sa's men who killed Ruamsak in the hut?"

"He was very dead," pointed out Bonchoo. "With a Shan knife in him, and as you know they sent a number of men to be sure the job was done. The blue van. The two *naklengs* on the motorcycle. There is much determination there!"

"Yes, and kidnapped Cyrus as well," she reminded him. She studied his broad, high-cheekboned face, trying to sort out the facts he had given her and to weigh them. This was not New York or even Bangkok, she thought dryly, it was a very strange world to her; she was not accustomed to warlords and smugglers and it was necessary to translate his story into something she could understand, to forget that she was seated in a hilltop jungle and to reduce Bonchoo's story to facts, understandable facts. And the longer she thought about what he had told her the less satisfied she became: there was something wrong, it was too complicated and it did not match what she knew of human nature.

There were too many people in his story.

She said idly, "And you insist that Ruamsak's information had nothing at all to do with this Wen Sa and his—uh—opium empire?"

Bonchoo said firmly, "Absolutely. Ruamsak I trust."

She nodded, and having gone over his story again a twinkle came into her eyes and she smiled. "You know, Bonchoo," she said, "you make an excellent storyteller but I don't believe your story. If I'd not been so worried about Cyrus—"

Affronted, he said, "You call me a liar!"

She shook her head. "Oh no, but a very good teller of tales, except that your story simply doesn't add up."

"Add up?" He scowled at her. "Why? How?"

She held up one hand, and finger by finger ticked off the discrepancies. "One, if you didn't trust Jacoby you would scarcely have gone to him and placed Ruamsak's life in his hands. Two, after doing that you allowed Ruamsak to go to Chiang Mai and then you followed only to see if it was a trap. Three, you were there in the hut with the dead man and you certainly didn't act as if a good friend of yours had been murdered, and four, if you're not involved in all this, why did those two men try to kill you on the road?" She sat back, smiling at him. "As I say, if I'd not been so upset about Cyrus I'd have realized at once that Ruamsak wasn't killed in that hut in Chiang Mai."

"But you saw him dead!" he protested.

She shook her head. "I saw someone dead but I don't believe at all in your Ruamsak; I don't, for instance, believe he's dead at all. I think Ru-

amsak is very much alive and it was someone else who was killed back there in the hut."

His mouth dropped open. "Not Ruamsak!"

"No," she said, smiling at him, "because I think I am sitting here and eating eggs with Ruamsak and I've been traveling with him all this time." Pointing a finger at him, she said, "*You're* Ruamsak."

His eyes narrowed. There was silence while they regarded each other warily, a silence long enough for her to realize that if Bonchoo preferred not to be identified as Ruamsak he could easily kill her and dispose of her right now.

But she had misjudged him, it was his pride that had been wounded, as she realized when he lifted a hand and hit himself on the forehead, a gesture both despairing and oddly touching. "*Yai*, but I am no damn good at this game," he said sorrowfully. "Yes, I am Ruamsak. But Ruamsak is only a name, the name of my grandfather. I did not lie, I am really Bonchoo, you understand."

She smiled. "Then I'm terribly glad to meet you at last —both you and Ruamsak— because I thought I'd lost not only Cyrus but Ruamsak. You see, I didn't just wander into that alley to take snapshots, Cyrus and I were the ones sent to meet Ruamsak and pick up his package of information."

He startled her by bursting into laughter. "This is so? I ask you," he said, "who would have thought it? They send me a clever one! I thought maybe it could be your husband but it is true that after seeing you back there—" He lifted an arm and slashed at the air.

"Cyrus is very clever, too," she told him primly, "but if you're Ruamsak then where is the information you were to give us?"

He stopped laughing. "It didn't occur to you?" he said in surprise.

"What didn't occur?"

"Your husband must have the package, or why else would they have seized him and taken him away?"

CHAPTER 8

"CYRUS?" SHE GASPED. "HOW COULD CYRUS POSSIBLY HAVE IT? HE was captured out on the street, he didn't even enter the alley!"

Behind them in the jungle a parrot gave a fierce derisive squawk that was answered from a tall tree to their left. "Don't throw those eggshells," Bonchoo said quickly, "they would be noticed by anyone behind us."

"Bonchoo," she repeated sharply, "how could Cyrus possibly have your package?"

He sighed. "Very easily, I am sad to say. You must understand what I had was a letter to hide. The information I carry in my head but of what use without proof, who would believe? It had to be hidden cleverly so I took it yesterday to a man in a lacquer shop to have it made into a *phyot* arm-ring, which wards off evil spirits." He explained to her how he had rolled the letter into a tube, and what the man had told him. "It's too bad the lac needed time for drying; I should have thought of something else but it was too late. He was to bring it to me this morning, early. Before you came I was hiding outside the window, trying to think what to do next, when someone rushed into the hut, gave a cry and ran out." He lifted both hands in a gesture that was both rueful and apologetic. "I think it was the man delivering the arm-ring, I think it had to be."

She thought back to a more carefree hour of the day. "Someone did run out of the alley," she said slowly. "I'd forgotten that, he nearly ran into me. He was certainly in a great hurry."

Bonchoo sighed. "Can there be any other reason your husband was taken away? The man from the lacquer shop came to deliver my arm-ring; he found a dead man and rushed out. In a panic the man must have dropped the arm-ring and your husband picked it up, or even maybe he gave it to him, anything to be rid of it." He added thoughtfully, "You no-

tice the men did not kidnap the man from the lacquer shop, it was your Cyrus they chose."

She frowned over this. "You mean they were across the street watching and waiting?"

"Yes, waiting for the man who tried to kill me to come out and say I am dead. And for him to bring with him the package they had been told I had."

"I must have proved rather useful, then, as a shield." She reflected that the hut had certainly been a busy place for that hour, and she winced as she remembered how casually she had walked down that alley. She said, "It was you who killed the Shan in the hut, then."

He nodded. "Yes, and for such a matter I lose great merit, even if it is to save my own life. We fought hard, he was very strong." He shivered. "I have never killed a man before, this is a grave matter for a Buddhist."

She said soberly, "But you're earning back much merit by your kindness in helping me now."

"Kindness!" he exploded. "You think I can go back to my family and to my village when Wen Sa's men think I am informer?" His hand darted to his throat and with a finger he slashed it from left to right. "Nobody is safe from Wen Sa's men when it's believed he's a spy. No, it's not kindness. I have no future, I am not safe until I find the *phyot*-ring and prove Jacoby is a big liar."

"You hope to find Wen Sa, then?"

"Nobody finds Wen Sa," he told her, "but I know many of his men, our paths cross in the mountains, all of us being smugglers—"

"So you really are a teak smuggler," she broke in.

He nodded. "—and they will take my words to him. I told you I know them." His lips tightened. "This Jacoby is a snake, I tell you, a *naga*."

She looked at him curiously, again seeing him differently. "How on earth did you become involved in this?" she asked. "How on earth did you ever contact people in the—well, the United States?"

"Oh, I wrote letter to them," he said simply.

She stared at him in astonishment. "You *wrote* to them, you simply wrote a *letter*?"

"Of course. Jacoby was all the time smoking opium . . . I grow suspicious how he earns so much U.S. money to buy it when he pays so little *baht* to me for the gossip I bring him. One day I sneak a look in the steel box in his room, and just as I suspect, everything he is paid for is what I, Bonchoo, pass on to him. I am earning all his money for him!

"But there was more," he said. "He had made certain changes in what I tell him, he was sending lies." He shook his head. "Jacoby was—how

you say—playing two games against a middle, working for the Vietnamese across the river in Laos, too. And the address I found there, a Mr. James T. Carstairs—"

"In Baltimore, Maryland," she said with a smile, nodding.

"Yes, so I write to this Mr. Carstairs, I offer a deal. I tell them if interested they can write to me—but I took such care," he said, scowling. "I was so careful! They wrote to me in care of the jade shop in Mae Sai which my *hnawng kuhee*—brother-in-law—owns. That was a few months ago, and that is how it began."

"I don't know why I'm surprised," she said contritely. "I myself applied in person for work as a spy. You hoped to make money doing this?"

He sighed. "I smuggle teak but when I tell you I have five children, a wife, a mother-in-law, a father-in-law living in my house you will understand there is never enough money, not with all the bribes I have to pay the patrols. I was greedy," he said sadly. "But I was also very careful, so I do not understand. Jacoby must have seen me going through his papers I don't know—or maybe when I stopped coming to him with news he turned sly and paid someone to follow me and learn why. I have not been careful enough, I see this," he said ruefully.

"Did Jacoby come to Chiang Mai? Was he one of the men in the blue van?"

"Oh no, Jacoby is too sick to walk far, he could never leave Chiang Saen."

"And you really believe he turned to Wen Sa's men?"

Bonchoo shrugged. "In my village, where else could he turn, who else would he know? There are many Shan in my country, and they are peaceful. The man who tried to kill me was a Shan, and he was not peaceful. It was very well planned, too, and Thai people are not such good planners."

"How can you be so sure?" she asked curiously.

He smiled. "To you we look all alike, eh? I, for instance, am not pure Thai, I am half Chinese—a Thai-Chinese person. The hill-tribe people have Tibetan blood and dress like Laotians. The Vietnamese are tall. A Shan does not have to wear a towel wrapped around his head like a turban for me to know he's a Shan, it's in his face. But we have stopped long enough," he told her, with a glance at the position of the sun. "We've rested long enough, it's time to go."

Mrs. Pollifax nodded and stood up, stuffing banana skins and eggshells into her pocket. She had not been relieved of her worries about Cyrus but she could admit to relief at learning that Bonchoo was as motivated as she was in finding him. She would have liked to ask him about the political information that he carried in his head but that would

have to wait for the next rest. She also longed to ask him what he thought of Cyrus's chances in the hands of Wen Sa's men but she needed very much just now to hang on to both optimism and hope and she wasn't sure that Bonchoo could provide either.

As if sensing her thoughts he gave her a sympathetic glance. "I want you to know, Mrs. Emily, if your *sahmee*—your husband, I mean—has the *phyot* arm-ring with him he will be safe, I promise you, because it also contains a yantra blessed by the abbot of Chiang Rai."

Mrs. Pollifax was not entirely consoled by this but she thought that the blessings of a Chiang Rai abbot were not to be underestimated, and that it was generous of Bonchoo to tell her this.

"One thing more," he added as they prepared to leave. "We move very quietly now, this mountain country is dangerous. No speaking!"

Startled, she said, "Dangerous how? Wen Sa's men?"

He shook his head. "Bandits."

"Bandits?"

"Like the snakes they come out mostly at night but if they hear or see us, and you an American—"

Nothing had prepared her for bandits. "But who are *they*?" she gasped.

"Thai *naklengs* too lazy to work," he said scornfully. "They rob the hill tribes who have no protection, they prey on them like vultures and rob anybody else they find who walks on the trails with no gun. We do not have a gun," he pointed out.

Mrs. Pollifax thought of the cube of pure gold that she carried in her purse. "You mean we must beware of bandits as well as Wen Sa's men?"

"And of the hill-tribe people who might think we are bandits."

"Might think we are bandits," she repeated dazedly.

He added comfortingly, "It's fortunate that you are a woman, and American; I do not think any opium smugglers will think you a spy and kill you. You do not look a spy at all," he told her happily, his face beaming at having found such reassurance for her.

"How nice," she said weakly. "This is certainly very different from Bangkok!"

"Oh Bangkok," he said dismissingly. "Bangkok is only big showcase. Bangkok sucks the rest of the country dry, it grows rich and big while people in the north grow poorer and poorer. *Nothing* changes here—nothing!"

His anger startled her but she said nothing; quiet she would be, and slinging her purse over her shoulder, she tucked the remainder of the precious cola in her pocket and followed him into the dark opening

where the trail resumed. They had left no traces of their stop; Bonchoo had even coaxed the grass upright where he'd sat. She was beginning to understand the importance of this as the surrounding forest changed again for her, no longer a deserted and mountainous corner of the north but a place where people pursued dangerous games, followed secret trails, moved across borders, made their own rules and killed or robbed intruders.

Oh, Bishop, she thought reproachfully, and then, *Oh, Cyrus*, and she was aware again of how a life could change in the flick of an eyelash, or at a pause beside a water jug in Chiang Mai. On the positive side, however—and she had grown tired of dark thoughts—she had not left a dead Ruamsak behind her after all, and she had her fragment of sardine wrapper to prove that Cyrus had been alive when he entered the jungle. She thought also—not without grim humor—that this was certainly an interesting way to distance herself from the Hong Kong experience; there was nothing quite like the prospect of facing bandits, opium smugglers and hill-tribe people to exorcise an experience in the past. It was reassuring, too, to learn that Bonchoo had a wife and family in Chiang Saen: links of dependency were being forged between them that she hoped would not unravel as they traveled on.

Or as she tired . . . there was that, certainly, because Bonchoo was strong, he was a man accustomed to steep mountain trails and to roping together such huge logs of teak as she had seen pass by when she sat on the terrace of the hotel in Bangkok. Since her experience in Hong Kong—*say it, Emily*, she told herself, *you were tortured*—she had been something of a convalescent, still doing her yoga and practicing her karate but—she had to admit this, too—allowing Cyrus to pamper her. She was out of condition when she could least afford to be, and if those two young *naklengs*, as Bonchoo called them, were on the trail behind them now . . . She did not finish the thought. She had just lifted her eyes to what lay ahead, and as her eyes followed a trail that met the side of a mountain and went up—and then up higher still—she thought in horror, *Good God, it's like a ski trail.*

Whether she was in condition or not she understood that she was going to have to push herself mercilessly and pick up the pieces later; there would be time enough to relax once they found Cyrus.

If we find him, she thought bleakly . . . if we *can* . . . and discovered that her thoughts were darkening again. She glanced at her watch: time had stopped existing for her but she saw that the time lacked fifteen minutes to two o'clock and they had therefore been climbing up and down these tortuous trails for three hours.

Courage, Emily, she told herself, and drawing a deep breath, began to climb the hill.

An hour later, stumbling along behind Bonchoo, Mrs. Pollifax realized that she was nursing a blister on her right heel, as well as a blister on the sole of her left foot. She wondered how many miles they'd walked since they entered the jungle but this scarcely seemed relevant when so much of it had been uphill. Irrationally, even crossly, she found herself remembering her former neighbor Miss Hartshorne, who planned her annual tours around cathedrals and museums and tirelessly photographed them for slides to view with her neighbors once at home. Mrs. Pollifax, wiping sweat from her forehead, wondered what Miss Hartshorne would think if she could see her now, limping along a forest trail, bedraggled, blistered and sweaty, lacking official guides and historic buildings. It was a pity, she thought, that Miss Hartshorne had never known where she went when she vanished periodically to work for Carstairs; Mrs. Pollifax had often been accused by her friend of lacking a sense of adventure, and— later— that she chose such unpleasant places with which to begin her travels, a view shared by her daughter Jane. *"Bulgaria?"* Jane had wailed. "Mother, how can you choose such an inconvenient place!"

Jane, she felt, would consider this too an inconvenient place. In fact only her son Roger had ever suspected anything unorthodox behind her sudden departures. It was her son Roger who had told Cyrus with a grin, "I can't tell you how relieved I am to see her marrying you. Those weird trips she's taken, with never a postcard from her and never any photographs of what she's seen, not to mention her return from Switzerland with her arm in a sling, and from China with a broken wrist, and the most improbable explanations!"

"Turning her over to me, are you?" Cyrus had asked with a twinkle.

"Gladly," Roger had said with feeling. "I suspect you know very well what she's been up to but I've never wanted to pry. Now *you* can do the worrying."

These thoughts only barely diverted her as she limped along behind Bonchoo. *Mind over matter*, she told herself, determined not to collapse until Bonchoo did, and having finished that particular train of thought she turned to exercising her fingers for coin palming, and tried not to notice that the blister on her heel had just broken and that it was probably blood that was seeping into her shoe.

The trail had narrowed, and if they were now several thousand feet above sea level they were also closer to the sun. The accumulated heat of the day had turned the air in the forest oppressive and still. Into this

stillness there came a faint rustle among the tangles beside the trail, as if a small and very welcome breeze stirred the leaves.

Bonchoo suddenly stopped. Staring into the underbrush, he raised both hands and shouted, "*Rau penn ploen—rau penn ploen*!"

Disconcerted, Mrs. Pollifax stopped, too, and looked into the forest, seeing nothing at first, and then in the dim light her glance caught the gleam of something long and thin and metallic protruding from the leaves. She thought, *That's a rifle*, and she stood very still.

A harsh voice called back, "*Rau penn kai*?"

Bonchoo began speaking rapidly, lightly, with many shrugs and a wry note in his voice. The tangles parted: the rifle emerged first and then the man, small and wiry, his brown face a network of lines like seams stitching together features that looked almost Tibetan, the cheekbones so high they nearly suffocated his bright and wary eyes. He wore a rusty black shirt, gray pants, sandals and a band of ragged cotton around his head. From one shoulder hung a game bag and from his waist a machete in a sheath made of reed.

She said anxiously, "What is he saying?"

"I've told him we're friends."

"Yes, but does he believe you?"

Bonchoo said dryly, "If he believed me he would remove the rifle from my stomach."

"But who is he?"

"He's an Akha and he doesn't speak Thai very well. He insists we go with him to his village to see the headman, who does speak Thai. It's about three kilometers from here."

"But I don't want to go!" she protested.

"No? We're lucky he didn't shoot first," Bonchoo said. "Apparently there's been some trouble here this week. If I can just convince the headman we're not spies or bandits—"

"I don't feel at all like a bandit, I just feel tired," she said crossly. "Ask him if he's seen a very large American with two Shan."

Bonchoo shook his head. "Later, later. Think you can manage three more kilometers?"

"Uphill or down?"

He smiled reluctantly. "The Akha never live on hilltops so it will be halfway down the mountain. Maybe half up, half down."

She sighed. "Let's get it over with then," and wondered why the Akha never lived on the mountaintops.

This time the Akha led the way, which surprised Mrs. Pollifax because she thought that, if either she or Bonchoo had the energy, they

could easily overpower him from the rear. This delusion was dismissed, however, when she clumsily stepped on a dry branch that had fallen across the trail: the man whirled and this time it was she who felt the rifle pressed into her stomach. She gave the man a weak, apologetic smile and they continued.

She was beginning to feel lightheaded from altitude and exhaustion when the Akha stopped and held up a hand, listening. Turning, he gave them each a hard glance and spoke in a low voice to Bonchoo.

"We leave the trail," Bonchoo told her. "Fast! And don't speak!"

Stepping under and over vines and scrub, pushing aside long sweeping branches and tall razor grass, she followed the two men off the trail into the jungle. Mercifully they did not have to go far; reaching a screen of palms they simply stood, Mrs. Pollifax wondering what on earth was happening until, very faintly, she heard a soft plodding of hoofs. Off to her right a cloud of dust drifted in among the trees, and then — on a trail that ran counter to theirs, and no more than twenty feet in front of them — a procession of donkeys began passing their hiding place in a long line, each bearing loaded panniers, the procession led by a man wearing a dusty turban and carrying a stick. He was followed by three other men walking stolidly, silently along the forest trail with no whisper of sound except for the muted thud-thud of the animals' hoofs and a faint creak of leather. It was the silence of their passing that awed her, they seemed to her to be moving in and out of her vision like figures in a dream.

The dream and the silence were abruptly shattered by shouts behind the caravan. The procession came to a stop and two men hurried up the trail, calling and waving to them.

Bonchoo nudged Mrs. Pollifax and she nodded: one of the young men wore a bright red shirt and the other a bright yellow shirt: she recognized them both.

So they're still after us, she thought bleakly, *and what astonishingly fast time they've made! I didn't hit Yellow Shirt hard enough*, she thought sadly, and deplored her lack of ruthlessness. She could see the faces of the two clearly now through the screen of leaves as they talked and gestured to the men of the caravan. Red Shirt was very young but he looked tense as a coiled spring, face intent, eyes narrowed as he spoke. His companion in the yellow shirt looked less ambitious but less innocent as well: he had a hungry, wolflike face. Something was decided, the four men of the caravan did not look pleased but they nodded and the procession resumed its pace with Red Shirt and Yellow Shirt following in the rear.

In their hiding place they waited for a long time, which gave Mrs. Pollifax far too many minutes to understand that the two young *naklengs* had not abandoned their hunt but were working the trails now looking for them, and if the path they had taken was a shorter one, as it had to be, then it meant that they knew the jungle very well. She thought, *They must not find Bonchoo.* He was her lifeline, he was all that stood between her and the forest's unknowns . . . She decided fiercely that she must not, *would* not, allow those two hoodlums to kill him.

The sounds of the caravan had been gone for some ten minutes before the Akha moved. Leading them across the broader trail, he pushed aside palms and scrub and they entered a footpath that was no more than a thread of a trail, scarcely visible and nearly overgrown.

To Bonchoo she said in a low voice, "Did the two *naklengs* ask those men if they'd seen us?"

He nodded. "Yes, and they came very near to seeing us, too, for which I will burn much incense at the temple if I live through all this."

"And the caravan, was that opium?"

"No, no . . . guns."

"I'm so tired, Bonchoo. And thirsty."

"Another mile," he told her.

Another mile . . . Her feet felt to her like bleeding stumps and her horizons had shrunk now to a thin line of red earth on the path in front of her; any future beyond the next moment was beyond comprehension, and the hope of catching up with Cyrus was receding into a distant dream that lay beyond a tougher goal called Survival: surviving collapse, thirst, two young *naklengs* searching for them, and now this detour to a mysterious village where a mysterious headman would decide if they were dangerous. Time blurred; she counted the pebbles on the path and tried to breathe deeply, which was easier now because the trail had leveled and the endless climbing had ceased. But still the mile that Bonchoo had promised her felt like an eternity.

Somewhere ahead a dog barked. In the woods a pig grunted. She looked up from counting pebbles and saw a clearing ahead of them, saw the outline of a steep thatched roof and then a dusty compound with a pig scratching in the earth. The path broadened, they entered the compound and the scene was no longer empty as people came into view: half a dozen children came racing toward them, followed more slowly by women in strange, cone-shaped headdresses, the women holding back shyly.

"We're here," Bonchoo said, and then, seeing her face, he said anxiously, "Are you all right?"

She looked at him and then at the sunbaked clearing, gold in the af-

ternoon sun. She said in a trembling voice, "If I could just—" She stopped and began again. "If I could just—"

The words refused to come; she stared at Bonchoo and at the Akha in astonishment, gasped and fell forward. The two men caught her just before she hit the ground.

CHAPTER 9

THE NEWS OF A COUP UNDERWAY IN THAILAND REACHED CARSTAIRS at seven o'clock Thursday evening and he realized that still another evening would be devoted to affairs in Bangkok. The coup had begun an hour earlier with the capture of Radio Thailand, and it was rumored that First Army Headquarters in the heart of the city had been surrounded and captured. Eleven people were reported dead and thirty-six wounded. According to the meager news given to the U.S. Embassy and the wire services, the coup attempt involved rebel forces in the Thai Army, but led by whom was unknown. The coup had begun at six o'clock on Friday morning.

In Langley, Virginia, it was still Thursday.

"Really spooky, these time differences," Bishop ventured as he returned to his desk to analyze the information reaching them. "Positively mystical, realizing that right now, at this very moment " He glanced at his watch. "At this very moment it's 7:20 Friday morning over there and people already know what Friday's like, and have also," he added pointedly, "had a charming sleep tonight, which you and I may be denied, and they're actually experiencing a day we've not reached yet."

"You're being whimsical," growled Carstairs.

"No, I suspect rather metaphysical," Bishop said, considering this. "Fraught with time-and-space speculations, surely? Do you think, by the way, that Mornajay's mysterious flight to Bangkok had anything to do with this coup?"

Carstairs said with a wry smile, "The department provides no crystal balls, unfortunately. Of course anything's possible but if news of a pending coup drew him there then everyone Upstairs would know where he was, and above all his assistant. No, my best instincts tell me that something else is afoot."

"Are you thinking this because of his insistence on using a novice like McAndrews?"

Carstairs looked troubled. "That, too, is completely out of character for the very efficient Mornajay, but so is his bolting and leaving so many stones unturned."

"With the possibility of nasty things under those stones?" suggested Bishop. "There—I've said it. I know you swear at him a lot but what's your impression of the man?"

"A cold and uncomfortable person, all brain and no heart," Carstairs said. "Comes from cold country too—Minneapolis. You heard Holloway describe him: a large man with a large ego to match."

Bishop shook his head. "*Very* mysterious, although I have to confess that what worries me most about this coup are the eleven people reported dead, and thirty-six injured, and McAndrews still hasn't turned up a clue as to where Emily and Cyrus might be."

Carstairs said briskly, "Nonsense, they'd scarcely be—" He stopped, looking startled.

"Ah, but we don't know where they are, do we?" said Bishop pleasantly. "Dare I remind you of the many times you believed Mrs. Pollifax to be somewhere she wasn't? A few years ago you thought she was stuck in Istanbul and she turned up in prison halfway across the country in Kayseri. You were sure she was in Bulgaria and she telephoned us from Switzerland. You thought her dead in Mexico and she turned up bobbing along in a boat on the Adriatic, so how can you say they're not in Bangkok? Damn it," he said impatiently, "it's been hours since we notified the U.S. Embassy they're missing. Where are they, and why don't we hear from someone?"

"Patience, Bishop," said Carstairs. "It's only morning there, people have been sleeping."

Bishop yawned. "Lucky them." The telex began clicking again and Bishop leaned over it. "It says 'extremely fluid situation . . .' "

"That ubiquitous phrase that means they don't know what the hell's going on," Carstairs said with a sigh. "Whether right-wing fanatics are behind this, liberals, an old power elite or a new one, and above all whether they're pro- or anti-American and will succeed or fail."

"Wait, there's more," Bishop told him. "No Americans killed—that's a relief, sorry as I am about the others. Ah—here we are the coup is now rumored to be led by a General Lueng Nuang."

"Files," Carstairs said quickly. "He should be there. If not, try the computer."

"Right." As he walked past the phone he saw its red light flashing and

plucked it from its nest, saying "Carstairs's office . . . " He handed the phone to Carstairs. "It's Mornajay's assistant, Mrs. Hudson."

"Good—I told her I'd like to interview Mornajay's appointment Monday morning at the time of the phone call from Bangkok; he or she may have overheard something helpful . . . Yes, Mrs. Hudson," he said, and turned silent, listening closely.

Bishop, curious, gave him sidelong glances as he searched for a file on General Lueng. When Carstairs did speak again Bishop jumped.

"*Who?*" he said in a startled voice, and began scribbling notes. When he'd thanked Mrs. Hudson he dialed a number and asked to speak to a man named Lester Thomson.

Bishop found two paragraphs in the files on General Lueng and extracted them to read. He noted that the general had been a member of the Thai Parliament eight years ago, until it had been discovered that his personal fortune had ballooned to five million Thai dollars due to bribes and to payoffs in drug smuggling. Reading between the lines Bishop gathered that several others in high positions had also been involved, but that General Lueng had been made an example of to please the Americans, who were still investing thousands in helping to root out the drug trade. General Lueng had languished in prison for all of three months, had then been exiled out of the country and had returned within a year to become a general in the army again, from which Bishop concluded dryly that there was a deficiency of generals in the country, and that the old-boy system was alive and flourishing. While he scanned the material he could hear Carstairs introducing himself on the phone to Thomson and asking if he could see him as soon as possible.

"He's coming right over," Carstairs told Bishop, the call ended.

"But who is he?"

A wicked little smile hovered on Carstairs's lips. "Would you believe he's DEA?"

"Drug Enforcement Agency?" Bishop was astonished. "*That* was Mornajay's appointment on Monday?" It was not unusual for the various intelligence agencies to share information but technically such give-and-take was supposed to be authorized by Upstairs. Then he remembered that Mornajay *was* Upstairs, one of the top elite and presumably answerable to no one.

Thomson was prompt: a bulky man with Irish-blue eyes and a shrewd, humorous face. "You caught me just as I was leaving my office," he said. "You say this has something to do with my appointment on Monday with Mornajay?"

Carstairs nodded. "Yes."

There was silence while the two men eyed each other speculatively,

and then Thomson said without expression, "He walked out in the middle of our appointment, and I've been trying to reach him ever since. His assistant has been extremely evasive when I've called, telling me he'll return my call, except he doesn't."

"You were seeing him on a matter of importance?"

"Top-level importance—to Mornajay," said Thomson.

They're fencing—Thomson knows something, thought Bishop, and waited.

Carstairs said softly, "His assistant Mrs. Hudson has not been frank with you. Understandably, given the situation. Actually you seem to be the last person to have seen Mornajay, he's disappeared."

"Disappeared!"

"Apparently due to a mysterious phone call that came through while you were there."

Thomson shook his head. "Not necessarily."

Carstairs regarded him with interest. "Care to explain that? You said you were there on a matter of top-level importance to *Mornajay?*"

Thomson brought out a cigarette and became very busy lighting it. When he put away his lighter he leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs. "All right, I'll level with you, but strictly off the record."

"Agreed," said Carstairs.

"Frankly, I feel I've been sitting on dynamite and I'm not sure how to handle it. I came to see Mornajay first thing on Monday to present him with certain facts we'd learned after months of undercover work. I wanted him to explain certain coincidences "

Carstairs's brows rose. "Coincidences?"

Thomson stirred restlessly. "I'd feel better about telling this if I'd been able to finish my conversation with Mornajay. As it is, I'd only begun to sketch out the facts I'd brought him when he had a phone call and cut short our appointment. Very coldly and very curtly. Doesn't *anyone* know where he is?"

Carstairs studied him carefully. "I appreciate your candor," he said. "I think I can be equally as candid. Would it interest you to know and this too is off the record—that after a number of phone calls we've established the fact that Mornajay's been seen in Thailand?"

Thomson said quietly, "That shocks me."

"Can you tell us why?"

Thomson sighed. "Okay, I'll sketch it in . . . As you know, the DEA is particularly active in Thailand, where we're doing our level best to help the government stamp out the drug racket, which I might add is at times like a finger in the proverbial dike. We keep track of the various

warlords with their private armies and the Chinese go-betweens and merchants, and so on."

"The *chiu chao*?" inquired Carstairs.

Thomson nodded. "They're involved, yes—that network of unions and guilds that goes back centuries to ancient China, the same network that put Chiang Khai-shek in power in China . . . Unfortunately when Mao took over China the *chiu chao* simply filtered out into Hong Kong, Macao, San Francisco and so on. A very closed group with enormous influence. Their banks—oh, they're very respectable now –are involved in laundering drug money, and for over a year now we've also known that one of their top men is non-Chinese, and an American."

Carstairs said incredulously, "*American?* With the *chiu chao*? Impossible, they'd never permit it."

Thomson said tersely, "He married into it -a woman named Chin-Ling."

Bishop froze. It needed all of his discipline to keep from giving Carstairs the quick sidelong glance that would betray to Thomson that the name was not unfamiliar.

Carstairs said evenly, "Go on . . ."

"We've called this chap Mr. X, because in certain—er—wire-tapping episodes, that's how *they* refer to him. Very few people have ever seen him, he seems to operate mainly by telephone and by cable and to supply information and move large sums of money for them. He's very clever, very organized.

"But three weeks ago," he continued, "we lucked into something: one of their chaps was odd man out in an inside power play, and he had very strong suspicions that he was being poisoned. He came to us and turned informant."

Bishop waited, his mouth open, a strange feeling gripping him.

"He was in a position to give us something of a report on Mr. X," went on Thomson slowly. "He told us, for instance, that Mr. X knew Southeast Asia very well, having spent some years there during the Vietnam War, that he has apartments in Hong Kong and Bangkok, supports a wife in Bangkok but is seldom in either place. He uses the names Charlie Tegner and Kenneth Lance but his real name is Mornajay, first name unknown. He's about forty-five, was born in Minneapolis and it was during his stay in Asia during the war that he met and married this little Chinese girl named Chin-Ling, who just happened to have very high connections in the *chiu chao*."

Bishop closed his mouth with a snap. It was happening, he was hearing it and it was incredible.

Carstairs said pleasantly, "And you have discovered that Mornajay here at CIA was in Vietnam during the war, is roughly forty-five or forty-seven, was born in Minneapolis and by curious coincidence his first name is Lance."

"Yes," said Thomson uncomfortably. "Another embarrassment for the CIA?"

There was silence and then Carstairs said smoothly, not acknowledging the hit, "Your appointment was interrupted by a phone call. Any idea who from?"

Thomson shook his head. "No, he took the call in an adjoining room behind a closed door."

Carstairs said nothing. *Aha*, thought Bishop, *he's not going to share what he knows about the call being from Chin-Ling.*

"And you really think," said Carstairs quietly, "that Mornajay could be your Mr. X?"

Thomson sighed. "I don't know, and he's in such a formidable position of authority that it's a hell of a responsibility, this. I'd feel happier about it if he'd been given the chance to deny it. Or explain it. Instead he's apparently just—bolted?"

Carstairs nodded. "The worst possible thing he could do."

"Have you told them Upstairs that he's in Thailand?"

Carstairs shook his head. "Not yet. They know of his absence now and it obviously baffles them but no alerts have been sent out. If he doesn't return—"

Thomson said slowly, "It sounds to me as if he's on the run. What would make a man like this—if he *is* our Mr. X—risk everything to live a double life? I only met him last Monday but he struck me as—you'll forgive me, but he struck me as very colorless and frankly dull."

"But organized," put in Carstairs. "Highly organized."

"Money?" suggested Thomson, frowning. "Power?"

Bishop said impulsively, "How about the sheer exhilaration of living a double life?"

"Possible," Thomson said, nodding. "Certainly that would make the money secondary, and if he deals mainly in cables and phone calls, heaven only knows it could be managed long-distance. Tricky but not impossible."

Bishop said flippantly, "It would certainly explain his never marrying if he already has a wife."

But no one was listening. "Since he gives every evidence now of being Mr. X," Thomson said, "I'll alert the office in Chiang Mai. If he's going underground I'd guess that he's heading into the mountains, probably to find Wen Sa, shelter with him and eventually work out an escape

route under a new identity. We already know of a Thai general involved in the business, a General Lueng."

Carstairs laughed. "Heard about the coup?"

"No, what coup?"

"Began 6 A.M. Bangkok time, led, we hear, by a General Lueng."

"The plot thickens."

A coup . . . Mrs. Pollifax and Cyrus missing . . . Mornajay in Thailand . . . Listening, Bishop acknowledged that his alarm was mounting, not only at the thought of a traitor in the Department, and Mornajay of all people, but over two people very special to him. He had barely digested the fact that Emily and Cyrus had vanished when it had been followed by Mornajay's mysterious disappearance, and he was still reeling over Holloway's report that the man was seen in Bangkok only thirty-six hours ago. Because Bishop was much fonder of Emily Pollifax than of Lance Mornajay he worried now about a possible connection. He asked himself if Ruamsak's information might have concerned Mornajay's identity as Mr. X, and if this was possible, could Mornajay be behind Ruamsak's murder and the abduction of Cyrus Reed? Once the thought of Mornajay's defection was accepted it brought with it a nightmare of conjecture and worry.

Carstairs said grimly, "I think that in the continued absence of Mornajay we take this conversation Upstairs right now, don't you? I think we have to assume that Mornajay is a very dangerous man now, both to himself and to the Department."

CHAPTER 10

DIMLY MRS. POLLIFAX BECAME AWARE OF A MAN'S VOICE CALLING out in a strange language, of a woman answering and footsteps running. Tentatively she opened her eyes to see an expanse of red earth, a house with a thatch roof that swept down to nearly meet the ground, a young woman emerging from that house wearing a headdress that dripped silver coins. She closed her eyes; she was not, after all, at home or in bed, and there was something urgent and pressing, something lost that she had to find. Or someone.

When she opened her eyes again she was lying on a mat on the open platform or veranda of a thatch house, and she had not been hallucinating about strange bright headdresses because the woman bending over her was wearing one. Next to the woman stood a man looking down at Mrs. Pollifax, a young man with high smooth cheekbones and intense bright eyes. He was not Bonchoo; he wore wide-legged black trousers and a dark shirt and a knife in his belt, and Bonchoo hadn't looked like this. "Bonchoo," she murmured, and then, struggling to sit up, "Bonchoo?"

The young man called out to someone behind him in the shadows and moved out of sight. Sitting up, Mrs. Pollifax saw that she was virtually surrounded by children and women, all of whom wore the same headdresses and were staring at her in amazement, at her feet, her clothes, her face. Her shoes had been removed and the woman bending over her was applying a cool and soothing paste to the blisters on her feet. Her headdress was so near to her that Mrs. Pollifax's eyes could wander in awe over its intricate rows of hammered-silver circlets, its lines of tiny white buttons and red beads, all fringed by silver coins, the headdress rising to a peak in a cone of marvelous embroidery and a flash of red feathers. Feeling her glance, the woman looked up and smiled shyly. Her

face was small and worn, but sensitive, with a sweetness that surprised Mrs. Pollifax.

The man's call brought Bonchoo, and seeing Bonchoo again, that broad enigmatic face with its scar and its absurd hat, she felt a flood of relief and affection. "Bonchoo," she repeated, smiling.

He was followed by a gnarled little old woman wearing an identical headdress except that hers was shabbier but no less resplendent. "She brings water," Bonchoo told her, pointing to the jug the woman carried. "She boiled it for you, I saw to that. Treat it like gold, and not too much at once."

The old woman beamed at her, nodding vigorously as Mrs. Pollifax clutched the jug and drank. The water was still warm, and when she had assuaged some of her thirst she put the jug down to cool but she kept a hand around it possessively.

"Next she says you must drink this," Bonchoo told her, holding out a cup hollowed from the burl of a tree. "It's herb tea altitude-medicine for the heart."

She tasted it, made a face but obediently emptied the cup and to her surprise almost at once her heart stopped fluttering and steadied to a slower, stronger beat. She said in astonishment, "I do feel better, it works, please thank her. Bonchoo, I apologize for fainting but tell me what's happened, have you seen the headman, can we leave now?"

He squatted down beside her. "You have seen him, too, he was here a minute ago, this is his house." He pointed to where the young man had stood. "His name is Nouvak; he's a bright young man who knows how to deal with things."

"Yes, but can we leave? Bonchoo, they can't be far ahead of us, Cyrus and the—"

He held up a hand. "Wait Nouvak will tell you, he knows things. We are in luck, he speaks Thai, Akha, Hmong, some Shan and some English."

"English!" This seemed a miracle indeed in this remote mountain village.

The older woman had retreated, taking the children with her. The younger woman sat back on her heels and spoke words that neither she nor Bonchoo understood. "What is she saying?" Mrs. Pollifax asked. "Can you thank her?"

A voice behind them spoke. "I thank her for you, she is my wife Apha." It was Nouvak, returned, and after he spoke to his wife she gave Mrs. Pollifax a last timid smile and disappeared into the house.

Nouvak sat down beside Bonchoo and regarded her gravely. "I am

buseh headman," he said. "My English words not much useful, I practice, okay?"

"Please, yes."

He proceeded carefully, frowning over each word. "Bonchoo say you have lost a *sahmee*, a—"

"Husband," put in Bonchoo.

Nouvak nodded, studying her face. "And you seek for him."

"Yes." Bonchoo had been right, she thought, clearly these were the eyes of a man who "dealt with things," they were alert, intelligent, bright.

"And bandits seek you also, Bonchoo say."

She darted a quick glance at Bonchoo but his face was impassive. "Yes—two men."

"With guns? They have guns?"

"I don't think so," she told him and glanced questioningly at Bonchoo.

Bonchoo said, "If they had guns they would have shot us. No guns."

She did not want to talk about guns. She said, "You've all been very kind but can we go now?"

"Go?" Nouvak looked astonished. "But night comes!"

Bonchoo intervened. "He's right, it's not safe in the jungle at night and you need rest. He has said we may stay the night. Tell her what you've done, Nouvak."

"Yes. Already I send two men to the forest," he said. "To seek for *farang* and two Shan."

"For Cyrus!" she murmured happily.

"Also I have sent four mens to—to—"

"Guard?" suggested Bonchoo.

Nouvak grinned, suddenly boyish. "Okay yes. Up trees to guard village for bandits. No, *watch* for bandits. My English too slowly it returns! Now the *dzoema* comes and we talk."

"*Dzoema*," repeated Mrs. Pollifax doubtfully.

Bonchoo translated. "He tells me that in this village, in all Akha villages, the headman—the *buseh* is the man who deals with the outside world, with the government people, with the Chinese merchants who come to buy or sell, with the selling of rice and cloth to buy iron to make knives and rifles and machetes and such matters. It is the *dzoema* who guides the life inside of the village and governs it."

"Ah—I see," said Mrs. Pollifax, and feeling better now she moved to sit cross-legged, her feet tucked under her. An excruciatingly thin man was striding across the compound toward them, looking dusty and tired as if he'd been fetched from a faraway field. He gave her and Bonchoo

a shrewd glance and sat down next to Nouvak, his eyes on Mrs. Pollifax. He and Nouvak began speaking together, with Bonchoo listening attentively.

They appeared to be speaking about her and she watched the *dzoema* for expressions on his face that might explain the conversation. His skin was dark, the veins on his temple, his neck, his hands and arms standing out in ridges. He gestured frequently in a way that matched his expressive face. Once he laughed and she saw that his teeth were stained red from betal; when he listened he became very still, his eyes searching the face of the speaker.

Bonchoo turned to her at last. "They have been speaking of what is best. They have made us welcome, but hearing of bandits makes them uneasy, they moved here because in their last place they were robbed by bandits of silver, of the money earned from their cash crops, of an M-16 and of two goats."

"Oh dear," she said with a sympathetic glance at Nouvak. "Trouble we don't want to bring them."

"I've told them we can pay well for food, you have money?"

"A lot of 25-*baht* bills," she told him, trying to equate their value in U.S. money.

"Good, five will do for now, they're not rich here as you can see. They have also spoken of this situation. If they find no *farang* and Shan nearby—"

She said quickly, "But if they're not far away they would find them?"

Bonchoo nodded. "Yes, but if not, then they offer help in the morning. Probably," he added laconically, "to get us out of here before we bring trouble to them."

"What help?"

"A boy named Anu to guide us. The Akha know the forest and they know the smugglers. He says there is a Shan camp hidden deep in the jungle about twenty li—five or six miles from here, on the Burma border."

She said eagerly, "And they think that's where Cyrus is being taken?"

"Yes, but to go there is dangerous," he cautioned. "It's just over the border—another country—and if the smugglers think we spy on them—" His hand chopped the air. "They kill, and who's to know? We die in jungle. We will have to be very bold, and hope."

She looked at him seriously. "For myself I have to go, if Anu will only show me where to go, but you, Bonchoo? Does it frighten you?"

"Frighten!" he exploded. "I have been one scared Bonchoo all day, never *never* will I write letters again or be so greedy—if Wen Sa and my *phi*-spirits let me live."

"And do you think they will?" she asked wistfully.

Bonchoo sighed. "I will hope," he said, and seeing his cheerful face turn somber, she thought, *He fights for his future, too: wife, children, work, village, just as I fight for mine: one large, very dear man who likes to read in the bathtub, puts garlic in everything, loves to crouch in the cold to bird-watch—and I love him.*

With a gesture toward Nouvak and the *dzoema* Bonchoo added, "They do this because you lose a husband and your search for him surprises and impresses."

Nouvak's lips curved into a smile. "Our women do not leave the village, it's not Zang. We have proverb: A woman deals with what is between the house and the rice bin, a man deals with what is between other villages and ours."

She wondered what Zang might be.

He rose to his feet. "This is my house, you are welcome," and having said this, he walked into the house and disappeared behind a reed partition.

Bonchoo said, "I am going to see if I can buy a machete. Rest, there will be food soon."

But Mrs. Pollifax did not feel like resting, she was curious about this village, and the pain of her blisters had been alleviated by the paste that had been applied to them. Bonchoo and the *dzoema* had strolled to the end of the compound where a young man joined them carrying a machete that Bonchoo began to examine. Stepping into her shoes, she winced only a little and walked a few paces to test her strength. Shadows had begun to lengthen in the compound, and the forest behind the village was very still. As she continued walking a dog barked at her halfheartedly and then slunk away. Three girls wearing the ubiquitous headdress and carrying baskets of firewood on their backs came trudging up the path from the forest and stopped when they saw her.

"Hello there," she called.

They looked at each other, giggled and hurried away, darting curious glances over their shoulders. A hen emerged from behind a house, clucking noisily. A naked child wandered into the street, picked up a stick and disappeared among the trees. She felt that she had wandered into a different time warp and this was disconcerting to her, and yet she felt a sense of great peace that was healing after a day of shock and tension, as soothing to her jaded nerves as the herbs that had been applied to her torn feet.

She was peering into a rice bin at the end of the street when Nouvak walked up behind her. He said almost shyly, "You look at our village."

"Yes," she said with a smile. "Can you tell me about it? Bonchoo says you are Akha people, am I rude to ask what that means?"

He gave her a long look. "Come, I show you a thing," he said. "And while I show you—you do not recoil?—I practice the English. You walk?"

She nodded and he led her up one of the many paths entering the village; they ascended to a cleared space and crossed it, coming at last to the path that entered the deeper forest. Here he stopped and pointed. All that Mrs. Pollifax could see were two tall tree trunks standing a short distance from the path, scarcely noticeable against the forest except for a crossbeam that made an unusual horizontal among so many verticals.

"Our guardian gate," he said. "Very important to Akha, we have two." Lifting an arm, he pointed to the forest. "Outside is world of danger, inside gates we Akha live happy. The gates guard us from evil spirits, wild animals, violent death, robbers and sickness."

She turned to look into his face. "You find so many dangers out there?"

"It has shown us its dangers," he said simply, "it does not treat the Akha well." He said this philosophically, without resentment. "We get pushed away, we move many times."

"Doesn't the government here protect you at all? Does it provide schools for you, for instance?"

He smiled briefly. "The school arrives two to three times monthly but teacher speak no Akha and children speak little Thai. We are not—what is word?—citizens of this country, we have to protect ourselves. We do not wish to move down—" He pointed down the mountain. "We wish to stay free and be Akha, so when people want our land we go."

"And where do you come from?" she asked.

Not understanding, he said, "We come from our first ancestor A-poe-mi-yeh. All our ancestors live with us in spirit, they live with us right now."

Mrs. Pollifax, somewhat jarred by this, glanced around to make sure they were alone.

"We ask for guidance from them," he went on. "We invite them for food and drink at festival times. We live with many spirits, the rice spirit, the harvest spirit, the tree spirit. Maybe we have no written history but we know it—every man must know his ancestors sixty families back in time."

"Sixty generations!" she murmured. "You're not Buddhists, then."

"No—*forest* people!"

"But why, if someone should want your land, do you just go? You have rifles, I have seen them!"

"Because the Akhazang tell us not to fight."

They had begun to stroll back toward the village but at this she stopped. "Akhazang?"

"Yes, we live by its rules. The Akhazang tell us how and when to plant our rice, how and where to build our house, how to hunt the deer and boar, how to live and how to die."

"But none of this is written?" she said, frowning over this.

"Not written," he agreed, smiling at her. "But still we know. Our ancestors tell us. We learn it from our mother, from our father, from the *pima* and *dzoema*. It is told us many times—we *know*."

She bent down and picked up a pebble. "This, too, has a spirit?"

"Oh yes! Did you not know?"

She smiled and dropped it into her pocket with the banana skins and eggshells. "Your English keeps growing. Where did you learn it, Nouvak?"

"Mission school, Burma, but when the fighting began—" He shook his head. "That is when I was small boy, now we live here. The Akhazang say, 'Although a person changes, Akhazang does not change. Although a house is moved ten different places, the ancestor-basket does not change.' " He hesitated and then added, "You are sure they had no guns?"

Startled, she said, "Yes."

He nodded. "What we wish is to grow our rice and hunt, make joy with our festivals and raise our children to live by Zang. I am glad you see no guns."

"And what would you do if they came to the village with guns?"

"If we could not make them friendly with our rice wine," he said with a smile, "we would *-woosh*," he said, pointing to the dense forest behind them. "Always we live with the forest near us to hide in. The trees are our friends, like the sky and the stars and the sun and the rocks."

Touched by his beliefs and trying to remember that for the Akha, too, this was the twentieth century, she gave him the only gift she could think of by saying with great firmness, "They had no guns."

They had reached the compound now. He said, "To sleep in my house—you do not mind?—you must become a grandmother and sleep on the men-side. That too is Akhazang, you are not Akha and must not sleep on the women-side."

She laughed. "I don't mind, I will be a grandmother in your house." Down at the far end of the compound she saw Bonchoo seated on the platform of Nouvak's house smoking a large cheroot, his feet dangling: this was a new Bonchoo, affable and relaxed, content in the moment.

Whereas I, an American, she thought ruefully, *want instant results. I*

can be grateful for rest, food and a place to sleep tonight but I cannot shrug off the shadow over my life: I have lost a sahmee. She called, "Any news yet from the men looking for Cyrus?"

He shook his head. "Not yet, not yet . . ."

Seated on the floor of Nouvak's house they dined on sticky-rice, rolling it into glutinous balls with their fingers and popping it into their mouths. There were small chunks of meat and boiled pumpkin in a bowl swimming with juice but Mrs. Pollifax dared not ask what the meat was, given the poverty of the village and the dearth of animals. Rice wine had been brought out for the occasion and she understood that it was not lightly presented. *"Daw! Daw!"* Nouvak told her cheerfully, which Bonchoo informed her meant *drink, drink.* It had grown dark outside but there was enough light from the hearth to illuminate the house, which amazed her, being made almost entirely of bamboo. The overhead beams were laced with straps of bamboo; baskets hung from a woven bamboo ceiling, they sat on mats of bamboo on a bamboo floor, and the partitions that divided the house into kitchen, men's side and women's side were made of bamboo, all of it cut, woven, spliced and tempered by hand.

Outside, through the slits in the wall, she could see a half-moon rising . . . underneath the house she could hear a pig grunting as it foraged for the scraps of food that fell through the seams. She was aware of a number of children peering in at them over the floor of the veranda, whispering and giggling as they watched the guests: she and Bonchoo were an attraction. It was seven o'clock, the end of a day that had begun so innocently with Cyrus in a luxurious hotel in Chiang Mai, and now she was to sleep in an Akha village deep in the forests of the north. The contrast was palpable. Bonchoo, in the meantime, had begun talking in what he explained in an aside was country Thai, and after the men had laughed uproariously several times she asked to know what he was saying.

"Our Thai folktales are not for women's ears," he explained with a grin. "Very earthy. I am paying for our dinner with my wondrous stories."

Mrs. Pollifax, feeling ungenerous, wondered what she might do to pay for her share of their hospitality; there was only one possibility and as the fire dimmed and the children began to yawn in the rear she told Bonchoo, "I know a few magic tricks."

He looked at her in surprise and a dawning alarm. "But they live very close with spirits here, what do you mean?"

She told him.

"Aha—*gohn lamet*!" he told Nouvak.

"See dahn?"

Bonchoo shook his head. "No, no—*see kow*, white magic."

"What is this?" Nouvak asked her seriously. "You show us?"

Mrs. Pollifax drew out a coin, held it up for her dinner companions to see, and caused the coin to vanish and then to appear all over again: in midair, and then from Nouvak's ear. There was a long and astonished silence and then a child laughed in delight, and then another. Nouvak grinned broadly. At the sound of laughter the women came in from the kitchen and the children swarmed over the platform to see, while shouts from the compound brought a gathering crowd to stand outside and watch.

Gaining confidence, Mrs. Pollifax drew out a 25-*baht* bill, rolled it up, palmed it and, leaning forward, drew it out of a small girl's mouth. Laughter exploded, mingled with giggles and shrieks. Her instructor at home would undoubtedly be shaking his head and saying, "Clumsy, Emily, clumsy!" but in an Akha hill village what she produced was a miracle of magic, and the children grew so eager that Nouvak had to order them back so that the women could see. Drawing near to the end of her repertoire, she began to rue her success, but her audience did not mind in the least that she repeated her tricks a second, a third and then a fourth time. Bonchoo watched, his eyes warm with pleasure in her, and she learned that no matter what language children spoke, their ooh's and their ahh's were the same in every country. She could not have found a more appreciative audience.

A shout from the forest suddenly interrupted them. Startled, Mrs. Pollifax's coins dropped into her lap and she turned to see two young Akha men hurrying up the path and shouting.

Bonchoo and Nouvak at once rose to their feet; the crowd at the edge of the veranda fell back. There were exclamations and excited bursts of speech.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Pollifax. "What's happening?"

Bonchoo turned to her, smiling. "They have found him!"

"Cyrus?" she gasped. Her fears and tensions fell away from her and she jumped to her feet, straining to see into the darkness beyond the hearth.

"He's coming now," Bonchoo told her.

Behind the Akha men a paler face shone in the dimness and Mrs. Pollifax stepped eagerly forward.

Abruptly she stopped. "But that isn't Cyrus!" she cried and then, desperately, "That isn't Cyrus, I don't know who this man is but he's just not Cyrus, not Cyrus at *all*!"

The man they had brought to her stopped and glared at her. In a

coldly furious voice he said, "I don't give a damn who I'm supposed to be, I demand an explanation for this outrage. I was sound asleep in my sleeping bag when these two—two *savages*—prodded me with their guns and forced me here. The name's Mornajay, Lance Mornajay, and who the hell are *you*?" he demanded.

CHAPTER 11

"EMILY POLLIFAX," SHE SNAPPED, DISLIKING HIM INTENSELY BE-cause he was supposed to have been Cyrus and it was unforgivable that he was *not* Cyrus. What was more, he was arrogant, and obviously an American which made his arrogance especially annoying. He exuded authority: a large man in his late forties with a large pale face and a powerful jaw topped by a leonine head of curly gray hair. He was dressed expensively in exquisitely cut camping clothes: suede boots, faded jeans, denim shirt, and they were all immaculate. An expensive camera was suspended from his neck; he carried a sleeping bag in one hand and wore a backpack across his shoulders.

And he was not Cyrus.

He said explosively, "My good woman—"

"*Not* your good woman," she hurled at him, and as more men came to stand next to him, "Is one of those men your guide?"

His sigh was that of a man goaded beyond endurance by fools. "I don't need guides," he told her coldly, "I've trekked in these mountains before, with and without them." He added hastily, "I'm a photojournalist. Is it due to you that I've been waked up and dragged here? What are you doing here?"

Bonchoo, beside her, murmured, "Deliver me from journalists!"

Mrs. Pollifax said curtly, "I've already introduced myself. This is Bonchoo, and the headman next to him is Nouvak, and the men you called savages were being *extremely* kind and looking for my husband, who is lost."

"Lost?" Mornajay's glance raked Bonchoo. "Can't say much for your guide, then." To Bonchoo he said, "Very poor judgment, allowing a client to wander off, isn't it?" Turning back to Mrs. Pollifax, he said, "I suppose you're on one of those Jungle Treks they advertise, but I think

you ought to be told that your guide has very unwisely taken you much too far off the beaten track and into quite dangerous territory."

Bonchoo and Mrs. Pollifax exchanged glances and said nothing.

"Is this a Meo village?" he asked, looking around him.

"Akha," she said. "As Nouvak can tell you."

"I assume he doesn't speak English?"

Mrs. Pollifax enjoyed replying to this; very sweetly she said, "Actually he speaks it very well."

Mornajay had the grace to look embarrassed. Extending a hand to Nouvak he said gruffy, "Apologies to you then. I can only tell you it was a great shock to be waked out of my sleep by strange men with guns. Damn alarming, too."

He had a point there, conceded Mrs. Pollifax, and decided to forgive his rajahlike attitude, and his reference to savages, but still she could not like him and there was a strong feeling that he was not apologetic at all but only doing what was expedient.

"Now if no one minds—if I can finally *sleep*," he said curtly, "I will spread my sleeping bag out on the ground here, and get on with my sleep, for I want to get a very early start in the morning."

"Where are you heading?" asked Bonchoo.

He received no answer. Nouvak had called to someone in the shadows and was speaking now to the gnarled little man who had escorted them to the village. To Mornajay he said, "Lipha gives space to you for sleep in his house."

Tightlipped, Mornajay picked up his sleeping bag, nodded coldly to them and strode down the compound with Lipha. His departure brought silence. The charcoal fire was dying, and the night air growing cool. Several of the men turned and left, the children smiled happily at Mrs. Pollifax and one of them came up to her and touched her sleeve to smile shyly into her face. "Goodnight," called Mrs. Pollifax, as they left with their mothers. Apha came up and touched her arm, her eyes huge, shy and warm, and Mrs. Pollifax followed her inside to the women's side of the house, where Apha pointed to a bowl of water in which Mrs. Pollifax washed her face. She then crossed to the men's side, where Nouvak pointed to a bark-hide mat near the door.

Gingerly Mrs. Pollifax lay down and arranged her tired muscles; it was not so hard a floor as she'd expected, being of flexible bamboo. Dismissing a longing to brush her teeth and climb into pajamas, she thought instead about their long day, about Cyrus, about Bonchoo, about the two Shan *naklengs* and Mornajay, but mostly she thought about Cyrus. She remembered that after marrying Cyrus there had come moments during the first month when she had acutely missed her old life, the small

apartment in the middle of a city, her Garden Club friends and even Miss Hartshorne, whose managerial tendencies had once terrified her, and then one day she'd understood that Cyrus was missing old rituals, too, and they had talked of it, and after that she'd stopped looking back and had entered the present and stayed there happily. Now, lying on her woven straw mat, she could no longer imagine a life without him, and she had to face the fact that he might not be found. Bonchoo had explained his remark to Mornajay about journalists by saying that in the past several years some thirty journalists had been killed by violence in these mountains; people could simply disappear without a trace. Cyrus didn't speak Thai, he had no means of explaining either his innocence or his identity and she could see that English was not frequently spoken here.

She sighed and tried instead to think of Mornajay. She decided that her predominant feeling about Mornajay was embarrassment that he could be so pompous and rude. Like a bandit he had robbed the village of dignity with his comment about savages . . . savages indeed, she sniffed, and wondered what he was doing in these remote mountains. She wondered, too, what another day would bring. The night was filled with noises: a pig grunted, dogs barked, the bamboo walls creaked and from the jungle came the shrilling of cicadas. She hoped that she wasn't going to be too tired to sleep, and turning over, she began counting backward from twenty, very slowly; before she reached eight she had drifted into an uneasy, restless sleep.

It was still dark when she jerked awake: the men were dark sleeping shapes around her but on the other side of the partition the women were stirring. Mrs. Pollifax's eyes closed, she slept again and when she awoke the whole village had come to life: women were calling to one another, dogs barking, she could smell the woodsmoke of many fires, and from the kitchen came the murmur of voices. On this side of the partition only Bonchoo remained; he was sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"Well, Bonchoo," she said.

"*Yai* we are still here," he said ruefully. "I hoped if I rubbed my eyes it would all go away." He rose and peered around the partition. "Ah—breakfast!"

Once again Mrs. Pollifax arranged herself cross-legged on the floor and ate from the rice bowl, forming rice into balls that she now expertly tucked into her mouth and swallowed; there were also pickled greens and a refreshing tea. They had just finished when Nouvak appeared, ushering in a young boy of thirteen or fourteen. Both carried long thin muskets.

"Anu," Nouvak said, pointing to him. "He goes to show trail, I borrow him to you."

Anu smiled and nodded cheerfully. He, too, wore the game bag over his shoulder, but jauntily, with a machete tucked into his belt and the long pencil-thin musket over his shoulder. His face was round and very dark, his eyes lustrous and his black hair curly.

Strolling outside, Mrs. Pollifax blinked at the liveliness of the compound, at women at work pounding and sifting rice, weaving, bringing in pails of water, all of them in the curious headdresses that Nouvak explained were called *u coe*. The women glanced up and smiled, as if the memory of the evening lingered and still occupied them. She had supposed that Mornajay had long since left—it was already seven o'clock—but there he was, striding down the compound, looking incredibly immaculate still.

"Not gone yet?" he said amiably. "Where are you heading today?"

"West," Bonchoo said.

"West!" Mornajay's eyes narrowed. "That's pretty tricky territory. Did you check it out first with the Thai patrol for insurgents?"

Mrs. Pollifax said politely, "I have to remind you that we're looking for my husband. Did *you* check with the Border Patrol?"

"Of course not, they'd have insisted on an escort, which would be tedious and—in my case—unnecessary."

She looked at him curiously. "We're searching for a man, what are you looking for, Mr. Mornajay?"

He hesitated for just an instant. "For a lost monastery."

"A *what*?"

He said firmly, "A lost monastery. I told you I'm a photojournalist. When not on news assignment I'm putting together a book of photographs of Thailand's temples, *chedis*, shrines, with accompanying text on the Khmer influence, the Indian influence, et cetera. It would be a tremendous feather in my cap to find and photograph a centuries-old monastery no one else has seen."

Bonchoo said, "What makes you think there is one?"

"Oh, my good man," he said chidingly, "how does one learn anything? Scholarly research . . . a reference in an old manuscript, a chance meeting with a Border Patrol chap who claimed to have stumbled across it in the jungle. It would probably date back to the mid-thirteenth century when Burma was dominant, and when Buddhist monks moved freely back and forth between Ava in Burma and Chiang Mai in Thailand. That would predate the Mangrai's reign, no less! I really must find and photograph it."

Mrs. Pollifax thought it a pity that his personality tended to be so

abrasive because she could admire his enthusiasm. Seeing that Nouvak hadn't understood, Bonchoo turned to him and described what Mornajay had been talking about; she thought Bonchoo looked amused but she was startled when the headman threw back his head and laughed. A small suspicion entered her mind that both of them knew already of the monastery but she tucked the thought away for the moment. "It's time we go, isn't it?" she asked. "Is Anu ready?"

"Anu?" repeated Mornajay. "Who's that?"

"Our guide."

Mornajay looked startled. "I thought *he* was your guide." He pointed to Bonchoo.

"No," said Mrs. Pollifax gently, "Bonchoo is a friend, not a guide. Now if you'll excuse us—" She drew Bonchoo aside. "What do we owe them for their hospitality and for their lending us Anu, Bonchoo? I'm so grateful, I'd give them too much."

He suggested a sum and she pressed the money into his hand, but still it did not feel enough to her, and while Bonchoo dealt with paying Nouvak she went off to find Apha. She found her pouring mash into a trough, surrounded by piglets.

"Apha," she said. The woman looked up, smiling her shy mysterious smile, and Mrs. Pollifax wished with sudden devoutness that she could ask her what she was thinking and feeling, what lay behind that sensitive worn face, what it was like for her, an Akha woman in this remote village living the Akha way. Wanting to give her something personal, she groped in her purse and brought out her pocket mirror, the cluster of large safety pins that she carried for emergencies and a lipstick.

Apha looked at them and then at Mrs. Pollifax. She reached out, drew her hand back, looked again into Mrs. Pollifax's face and then as her fingers curled around the gifts her mouth curved into a joyous, radiant smile, she murmured excited words and ran into the house. Mrs. Pollifax called after her, "Goodbye!" and went back to find Bonchoo.

Mornajay was still in conversation with Bonchoo. Seeing her, he said, "Since you're heading west and have a guide I trust you won't mind if I accompany you for a few miles?"

She was not surprised, she had wondered only if he would ask politely or simply announce his intentions. She said amiably, "If it's all right with Bonchoo and Anu. You've given Nouvak the money?" she asked, turning to him.

"It is done."

As they turned to leave, Apha ran out of the house holding something that she pushed into Mrs. Pollifax's hand.

"It's a present," Bonchoo said. "She made it herself, she wants you to have it."

Now it was Mrs. Pollifax's turn to smile shyly and to stumble over words that were all the more fervent because she had never seen anything like what was being given to her: it was a necklace made of black seeds and white shells interspersed with pear-shaped brown gourds and bright red feathers, all strung together on a cord. Without regard for any custom or taboo that she might violate she gave Apha a warm hug. "Tell her," she asked of Bonchoo, "that I will always cherish this, it's lovely. And may her spirits of the forest be with her."

Bonchoo translated this for her and then said crisply, "We go!"

Mrs. Pollifax looked back only once at the cluster of dusty huts still wreathed in mountain mist. Smoke rose lazily from the kitchens; the boys and men were leaving to hunt or to work their distant fields, the women would cook and weave and spin and husk rice and carry water and firewood and welcome the men back at dusk. Everyone had a place, and work to do, she thought, with rules to live by and a tribal culture to guard and share. She would not forget: one day, perhaps while tending her geraniums at home she would remember Apha and the simple harmony in which she lived, but remembering home was to wonder with a stab of apprehension if Cyrus would be there with her when she reached it . . .

They passed the guardian gate, crossed a field of stubble and then Anu led them to a narrow trail that entered the forest, and they were returned to that very different universe of the jungle.

Some half a mile farther they came out on the crest of a hill and Bonchoo stopped, pointing. Drawing up beside him, Mrs. Pollifax caught her breath at what lay below them: from this vantage point, this small clearing, the hills slanted away and down like a cover of green corduroy tossed over the rounded knobs of earth and graceful hills, dipping, rising, falling until, far below, the forest reached a valley that lay at the base like the bottom of a cup. She saw, miles below them, a thread of road, a cluster of tiny roofs shining in the sun and all around them the uninterrupted sloping walls of green.

Hearing a click behind her, she turned and saw Mornajay taking a photograph. He lowered his camera, frowned over it, adjusted something and took another photo. "Marvelous specimen of *Bambus vulgaris*," he said.

"Where are we now?" she asked, turning to Bonchoo.

"Very high," he said. "Not just high in the mountains but on your map

we are now very close to the top corner of my country. Over there is Tanen Range," he added, pointing, "and over there is Burma. Not far."

"You know," she said, looking into his face, "you speak very good English. Do all —uh—smugglers speak it so well?"

He grinned. "Would you believe I study two years at Thammasat University on scholarship when I am a young man? Five children and a wife ago—that long!"

She was surprised, and started to speak, but Anu was waiting and Mornajay had put aside his camera to join them. They continued walking, leaving Mrs. Pollifax to consider just how a student in a Bangkok university might become—five children and a wife later a smuggler of teak in northern Thailand. This thought occupied her as the trail dropped away from the ridge and they entered deep forest again, the trees closing in on them, the air growing humid. A rattling of palms startled her, followed by a harsh and raucous scream and a flash of brown and yellow among the trees.

"*Nohk koon fawng!*" called Bonchoo cheerfully. "Speaking bird."

"*Genus Acridotheres*, one of your Asiatic starlings," Mornajay announced authoritatively. "You would probably call it a mynah."

"Probably," said Mrs. Pollifax and turned her head to glance at Mornajay curiously.

"We should also see some *Luscinia Golzii*, or at the very least a member of the *pycnonotidae* family called the crested bulbul," he added pleasantly.

"How nice," she murmured and turned back to the trail. The freshness of their morning's start was beginning to diminish as yesterday's overextended muscles resumed their protest. They walked in single file along the narrow trail, Anu in the lead, Bonchoo, then herself, followed by Mornajay. Her quick glance behind her had shown him to be tireless and she began to resent the pressure of his pace behind her. Bonchoo, she thought, at least had the grace to pant occasionally after negotiating a steep hill but Mornajay hiked uphill with ease and she wondered if he would either pant or sweat, and doubted either. He was, she thought crossly, as inviolate as the knife-edge creases on his khaki slacks; he was probably accustomed to lifting weights each morning or to jogging, a thought especially obnoxious to her because after each steep ascent she worried as to how Cyrus was managing them. If he remained ahead . . . *If* . . .

The trail leveled out; they passed massive teak trees, five and six feet in girth and rising beyond her vision into the sky; bamboos with marvelous fronds at the top, like dust mops; clumps of pampas grass, tall, soft and pale as dandelion fluff, and almost always the palms, rustling

secretively as if in conversation among themselves. Her antenna went out to absorb it, her eyes beginning to mark its variety and the infinite patterns that yesterday had struck her as monotonous.

Behind her Mornajay had stopped again; she heard the click of his camera as a brilliant-colored parrot flew away. He said with satisfaction, "Genus *Acridotheres*, a zygodactyl, order of *Psittaciformes*."

This time Mrs. Pollifax felt deeply and peevishly annoyed, and would have replied tartly if Anu had not held up a hand, muttering several words to Bonchoo.

"Border Patrol coming," Bonchoo said.

Once again they plunged through the underbrush, crawling under and over vines, Mrs. Pollifax feeling considerable satisfaction at seeing Mornajay crawl on hands and knees in his immaculate clothes. Up among the treetops a mynah bird squawked and flew away, and a subtle hush came over the jungle. She too heard it now, the thud of feet clad in boots filling the corridor of the trail. A line of men came into view, walking quickly in single file, wearing dull green camouflage uniforms and berets, guns slung across shoulders, ammunition belts thickening their waists. *So young*, thought Mrs. Pollifax, looking into their faces, and quickly looked away lest they feel her glance and peer in among the screen of vines and branches. She thought, *Those are police or soldiers, I ought to rush out and stop them, I should be telling them about Cyrus, demanding they find him. I should be ought to be—Why am I sitting here watching them silently pass?*

She sat.

To anyone looking for Wen Sa's men, she realized, these dozen soldiers passing by were the enemy, a thought that shocked her with its cruelty. She was under hill-country law now, in territory where soldiers patroled in the safety of groups, where the click of Mornajay's camera could just as easily be the click of a safety catch from a concealed gun and where Akha boys and smugglers of teak hid themselves at the approach of the military, just as Wen Sa's men would hide, too—or shoot. Bonchoo had been right in that respect: only those outside of the law had any chance and a slim one at that of finding Cyrus in these miles of densely packed mountains.

The men passed; they waited. Anu at last stood up and parted the vines and they returned to the trail.

"We rest soon," Bonchoo said. "We have walked now two hours."

Mornajay's slacks, she noticed, now held smudges of earth at each knee and she decided that this was kinder to think about than what might be happening to Cyrus.

Twenty minutes later they stopped to rest in a grove of bamboo, well

off the trail and in a space where a tall tree had fallen, ripping a hole in the dense forest ceiling to bring light down to this small patch of earth. Without a thought to snakes or crawling things Mrs. Pollifax flung herself to the ground to feel the exquisite relief of being no longer on her feet. Bonchoo had been consulting with Anu, who seemed to speak some Thai, but now he came to sit cross-legged on the ground beside her while Mornajay sat on the trunk of the fallen tree. Surrounded by bamboo, Mrs. Pollifax's eyes moved from one tree to another, following the lines of jointed stalks up to the patch of blue sky above. Seeing the direction of her gaze, Mornajay said, "Marvelous specimen of *Dendrocalamus giganteous*. Native to Burma but I daresay we're quite close to Burma now. Fascinating!"

This man has no conversation, she thought crossly. Acknowledging that she was tired and about to be as difficult as he was, she said tartly, "Considering that nine tenths of the earth's population call your *Dendrocalamus giganteous* by the name of bamboo, I don't understand why you have to be so pompous about it."

He said stiffly, "I *beg* your pardon!"

"You should," she told him loftily, and was silent, but indignantly silent.

Anu squatted down at the edge of their circle. Except for the occasional fluttering of leaves high above them, the forest was silent, the sunlight falling on clumps of moss, decayed leaves and dried branches. A butterfly twinkled among the vines that had sprung up at the edge of this minute clearing.

"I don't remember so many vines yesterday," she announced. "I feel a little as if I'm in a Tarzan movie."

"Tarzan?" asked Bonchoo, puzzled.

She happily explained Tarzan to him.

Bonchoo, brightening, said, "Like our *Pi Tong Luang*, the Ghosts of the Yellow Leaves!"

"Like *what*?"

"Yes, yes," he said, nodding. "They lived here, here in these very forests, like shadows. Invisible peoples! Sometimes woodsmen caught a glimpse, or loggers stealing the teak, there were always stories." With a glance at Mornajay he said dryly, "Like your lost monastery, *mai*? Then some years ago, not long before I am born, at the time of the big war when the Japanese occupy our country, they were found." He shrugged. "I do not know, maybe hunger drove them forward, or many soldiers came to the jungle."

"Ghosts of the Yellow Leaves?" mused Mrs. Pollifax. "What were they like, are they still"—she glanced into the forest—"still here?"

Bonchoo shrugged. "Who knows? They say there were only maybe five hundred of them left when found. Very shy, very frightened. Very small, too, I hear, but with handsome faces. If they lived in this forest for a long long time—like your Tarzan—they may still be here, why not? It is why they were called ghosts."

Mrs. Pollifax said uneasily, "Watching us even now?"

Mornajay said suspiciously, "How do you know so much about the jungle?"

"Oh, I know very little, I'm a river man," Bonchoo told him. "Along the rivers the jungle is like a wall, very dark, very dense, very scary, but always interesting to me. Once I talked to a man who studies such things, such matters as the Ghosts of the Yellow Leaves and our cultures, and he showed me that behind the wall and it takes a machete to get through there is . . ." He spread out his arms. ". . . all this. And sometimes now in my—er—business—I have to follow jungle trails, and he was right. Only once have I gotten lost, but well, never mind, that is another tale."

Mrs. Pollifax wondered if she dared to remove her shoes and decided that once removed she might not be able to put them on again. "You said you had been a student in Bangkok at the university, Bonchoo."

"A scholarship student," he said with a smile. "Would you believe from 1973, for three years, we tried real democracy in my country? It was because of what is now called the October Revolution changing matters, so that I—a poor boy from a farm near Chiang Saen—could go all the way to Bangkok to the Thammasat University, where rich people go."

Mornajay gave him a sharp look of surprise.

"How little I know of your country," said Mrs. Pollifax. "What was the October Revolution?"

"It was first time there was rebellion," Bonchoo explained. "It was first time students marched for democracy against the military government—and those students were children of government peoples, too! They had just begun to see how poor the rest of the country was, so they marched and made noises and the government listened, it was *scared*."

"And that's how you became a student, then!"

He nodded. "That is how I went to Bangkok in 1975—it was a miracle, a wonderland, I tell you! But it didn't last," he said sadly. "The military did not want democracy, it meant they lost control and lost their jobs and their power, so they organized, they planned and in 1976 there came the—the—" He stopped and swallowed hard. "What they did, for three years they organized the—what do you call it, the right wing? They formed Village Scouts and they formed together a group of

naklengs—hoodlums—and called them the Red Gaur—unemployed peoples who hated students. Bad stories were made up for the newspapers; they called the students Communists. Everyone who criticized was called Communist."

"A familiar ploy," said Mrs. Pollifax dryly.

"And then," he said soberly, "we had a sit-down demonstration at Thammasat. Never do I forget the date—October 16, 1976—each year I remember this. A peaceable sit-in, you know? *No!*"

To her surprise she saw tears rise to his eyes.

"What happened?" she asked quietly.

"The police, they attacked our peaceable sit-down," he said, and his hand went to the long scar on his face. "Many of my friends were hurt, and some die." He shook his head, remembering. "The police trapped us, they threw grenades, they shot guns—my friend Charoon died in my arms, all covered with blood."

Not elephants and temple bells and dancing girls, thought Mrs. Pollifax, hearing the anguish in his voice.

"After that," he said simply, "I came home. I love my country but I think the military will always rule us." He sighed. "I think about this very much."

"And what do you think?" she asked gently.

"That we have much blame," he said sadly. "We Thai are a gentle people, we have what you call master-slave history from our past, when we had many many kings. We depend on authority, we want protection. Our village headman gives us protection and we are ready to serve him because in the village he has the money and power. I speak from knowledge because I am a *phu yai ban* in my village—"

"A what?" interrupted Mrs. Pollifax.

He smiled. "What you would call 'big man.' I try to be honest but many such are not. Someone in Bangkok says the farmers should start a cooperative and it is started. The headman is put in charge and many times he keeps all the profits. Who complains? We are not used to complaining as peoples. The headman has grown rich from this cooperative? *Mai pen dai*, then *he* is the man to serve now, *he* has the money, *he* has the power." He sighed heavily. "Maybe one day when my children are grown there will—"

He was interrupted by a sudden hissing sound from Anu, who squatted at the edge of their circle. Anu held up a hand, his face very still and listening, his eyes combing the forest around them, and then, *"YAI!"* he shouted, springing to his feet. His shout was fierce and shocking.

It was an alarming moment. Bonchoo, startled, sat down on the ground; Mornajay, who had been sitting, sprang to his feet, and Mrs.

Pollifax, sitting, instinctively rolled over and joined Bonchoo as something flew out of the tangle of vines, parting the air with an explosive *swish.*

It was an arrow. It found the only person standing—Mornajay—and embedded itself in the empty camera case slung from his neck; the arrow hung there, quivering and vibrating while Mornajay stared down at it in horror.

CHAPTER 12

"DOWN!" SHOUTED BONCHOO. "GET *DOWN*!"

"Get this thing out of me!" cried Mornajay. "Damn it, get it out!"

Muttering angrily, Bonchoo seized Anu's rifle and plunged into the jungle, leaving Mornajay still upright and staring in horror at the arrow. Mrs. Pollifax jumped up and went to him, appalled by his pallor. For a moment she assumed that he'd turned white from shock until she saw the blood seeping out around the camera case: the arrow's velocity had been so fierce that it had pierced both the back and the front of the leather case and had entered Mornajay's midriff as well. For a moment she felt sick; it could have killed him.

"Sit down," she told him. "Lie down. *Now*."

He obeyed, his eyes still fixed on the protruding arrow, and it really was dreadful-looking. Its visible length was something like seventeen inches, which implied an arrow much longer, yet even as she stared at it she could note its nstrange beauty, the fletch fashioned out of thin strips of bamboo folded with exquisite craftsmanship to lengthen and hasten its flight.

"Anu?" she called, but he retreated from her with frightened eyes.

Bonchoo stumbled out of a network of vines. "They've gone."

"But who?"

He held out a fragment of red cotton. "The *naklengs* left this behind."

"So they found us. Mornajay's bleeding," she told him. "The arrow pierced the leather."

"It did that? And meant for me, of course." He leaned over Mornajay and made a face. "*Mai dai* nasty! Only a crossbow could do this."

"How deeply did it penetrate, can you see, can you guess?"

Mornajay answered through clenched teeth. "Deep enough. Who were they, damn it?"

"Later," Bonchoo told him, bringing out the Shan knife. "First we cut away some of this arrow so we can see the damage." To Mrs. Pollifax he said, "Hold the arrow tight, very tight."

They knelt on either side of Mornajay while Bonchoo carefully cut the arrow, shortening it by some fifteen inches. With Mrs. Pollifax holding the arrow at its point of entry he sliced around the camera case and removed this, too, gave Mrs. Pollifax a long glance, gently pried away her fingers and with one swift and ruthless motion he pulled the arrow out of Mornajay's midriff.

Mornajay screamed.

"Had to come out," Bonchoo told him, and wiped his forehead with his sleeve. "I do not enjoy this situation, Mrs. Emily."

"Why should you?" she commented dryly, and to Mornajay, "How do you feel? The sooner we get away from here—"

"I can still walk!" he snapped.

She looked at him doubtfully. "Could Anu take him back to the Akha village?"

Bonchoo sighed. "It is Anu who is here to guide us to the Shan camp which is well hidden—of course it is well hidden and without Anu—" He shivered. "I do not care to spend a night in the jungle."

"You mean we have to choose?" she faltered. "Take him with us or go back?" She sat back on her heels and looked at Mornajay, wanting to be kind and yet, "Bonchoo, we *can't* go back, we've come so far, it's taken so long!" *There ought to be antiseptic for his wound*, she thought, *there ought to be a bandage*; she hoped he wasn't in shock and she hoped the wound wasn't going to become infected because it looked ugly, the skin around it alarmingly flushed and red. "We *can't* go back," she said desperately.

Bonchoo spoke to Anu, who nodded and began cutting a stick of bamboo for Mornajay to use as a cane. They helped Mornajay to his feet; he swayed a little but his lips tightened with resolution and Mrs. Pollifax thought that he had the courage of a man who refuses to acknowledge any weakness in himself.

"I'm okay," he said. "I'll be fine. We've got to go on!"

She gave him an encouraging smile but the thought of Cyrus curtailed her deeper sympathies. They could not spare Anu Bonchoo was right about that—and they simply couldn't turn back now; it was a hellish situation that she could only rationalize by reminding herself that Mornajay had not been invited to join them but had pressed his company on them. They were going to have to exploit his pride in order to keep him moving, which was not a happy thought, but she had no happy

thoughts about Cyrus, either, who she had to believe was still alive somewhere ahead of them.

An unhappy case of triage, she thought drearily, and felt suddenly and unutterably tired.

She saw that Bonchoo was watching her. He said simply, "You must not give out now."

So he guessed. *What a good and decent man he is*, she thought, and gave him a grateful smile. "I know," she told him, and glanced at her watch: it was a few minutes past noon, and they had set out at eight that morning. "Is it far now?" she asked.

Bonchoo spoke to Anu. "He says—I think he says—only two hours from here but he doesn't understand distance. By the sun it will be " He pointed. "Middle afternoon."

"Good," she said, nodding. "I'm glad to know that, it helps."

"Lean on Anu," Bonchoo told Mornajay, and they began walking again, but slowly, with Anu and Mornajay setting the pace.

They had covered nearly half a mile of trail when Mornajay began to stumble, and after the third time this happened Anu turned and gave Bonchoo a helpless glance. "What is it?" asked Bonchoo and brushed past Mrs. Pollifax to join him.

Mornajay was swaying on his feet, his face flushed, eyes bright. He said in an aggrieved voice, "I refuse to take that as criticism, first of all because it's not so, and second of all —" He stopped. "Second of all," he began again, and seeing Mrs. Pollifax he looked puzzled. "You're not Chin-Ling," he said. "Where's Chin-Ling?"

Mrs. Pollifax reached out, touched his forehead and winced. "He's burning up with fever."

Bonchoo turned to Anu and asked a question, to which Anu responded at some length, with gestures. When he turned back to Mrs. Pollifax he looked deeply troubled. "He says—" Bonchoo hesitated and then blurted out, "He says the arrow may have been poisoned, dipped in *ya pit*—"

"Poison! Oh dear God," she gasped. "Mr. Mornajay " But Mornajay had dropped to his knees, where he remained for a moment and then slowly sank back to lie sprawled on the forest floor. Kneeling beside him, she cried, "Bonchoo, he's *desperately* ill, we've got to find help!" Even as she spoke the words she realized how ridiculous they were, because where on earth could they find help in a jungle so far removed from civilization? Unless—"What about those rangers who passed us?"

Bonchoo shook his head. "Many miles back and an hour ago, Mrs. Emily."

Anu spoke in a level, matter-of-fact voice and Mrs. Pollifax did not

need his words translated for her: from the look on his face and the sound of his voice she knew that he had calmly announced that Mornajay would die.

"But we can't — we *can't* just let him die," she protested. She looked down at Mornajay who was twitching and mumbling now, his face contorted, and she knew there was nothing she could do to prevent this. She had not liked him very much but she could not allow him such a sorry ending.

Bonchoo said slowly, "It is possible—"

She glanced up and saw his face thoughtful. "What is it?" she asked, rising to her feet.

"I don't know," he said with a frown, "but it is possible—" He turned to Anu and spoke, the boy listening gravely; they spoke together for several minutes, Anu inserting words, eyes narrowing, until he suddenly smiled, nodding briskly.

"But where is he going?" she asked in alarm as Anu headed into the grove of bamboo and pushed his way through the ground scrub.

"He is going to climb one of the tallest bamboo and see where we are," Bonchoo said. "We must be very near to the Burma border. *Too* near, maybe."

"The Shan camp? Does he think we're near the Shan camp?"

He shook his head. "Still an hour away, and to the south, he says."

She stood beside Mornajay and waited, trying not to think of the hopelessness of their situation. Through the screen of trees she could watch Anu skillfully shinnying up the trunk of a robust bamboo; he climbed quickly, his head disappeared and then his body and at last his feet and he vanished. The forest had turned silent, but not Mornajay, who was struggling to sit up.

"No, Mr. Mornajay," she protested, and Bonchoo knelt to help her. "Try to be quiet," she urged as he stared at her blankly, the pupils of his eyes hugely dilated. "Bonchoo, what is Anu looking for? What did you say might be possible?" As Mornajay sank back with a groan she said despairingly, "He ought to be given an emetic. If it truly is poison —"

"If it's what Anu calls the 'madness poison' it may act slowly," Bonchoo said. "One must hope—" He stopped as a voice called from the distance.

Mrs. Pollifax leaped to her feet. "What was that?"

"It's Anu," said Bonchoo, and shouted back to him.

Anu's bare feet came into view, then his body, then his head as he descended the bamboo, and despite her agitation Mrs. Pollifax marveled at his grace. He jumped the last few feet to the ground and came to them smiling.

"What has he seen?" she asked anxiously.

Bonchoo didn't reply, he was busy hurling questions at Anu. She wished that she spoke Thai, she wished she spoke the Akha language, she wished— "What *is* it, Bonchoo?" she repeated, because Anu's smile had faded, he was shaking his head.

Bonchoo turned to her at last. "There is something I hoped for, maybe half a mile from here, not far. But Anu refuses to go and see, so I must. I will not be long."

She said fiercely, "Go? Bonchoo, you're not telling me what Anu saw! Go where?"

He said, "No, because first please, I must first learn if it is the place I hope it is, a place I stumbled across once, a long time ago, when I was lost. There may be people—trust me," he said, and lifting the machete out of his belt, he brushed aside the vines and walked in among the columns of bamboo, except that unlike Anu he continued walking until she could no longer see him.

She stood for a long time staring at the place where he'd vanished, feeling bereft and very alone. She could trust him, couldn't she, he would return, wouldn't he? She glanced at Anu, who was watching her, gave him a weak smile and went back to Mornajay.

When she looked again for Anu he was gone.

"Anu?" she called, and then, *"Anu?"*

There was only silence; Anu, too, had vanished, but like a wraith, without a sound. She walked around the fallen tree and peered into the forest; she left Mornajay and walked back to the trail, her footsteps terrifyingly loud to her as she clumsily tripped over branches. She found the trail but it was empty, and returned to the fallen tree and to Mornajay, who was no longer mumbling but obsessively turning his head from left to right as if to free it from an intolerable burden.

She sat down beside him, stunned by Anu's defection and frightened by the thought that he might not return. She thought, *If he doesn't return how can we ever find Cyrus, how can we reach the Shan camp?*

"Anu?" she called again.

She wondered if Anu believed that Mornajay had been taken over by evil spirits, or—more optimistically if he had decided to go with Bonchoo, after all, and was following him.

Or perhaps, she thought with a chill, Anu feared the return of the *naklengs* who had tried to kill Bonchoo and might try again. At this thought she decided that she would not call out Anu's name again but would sit very quietly.

The silence was unnerving; it was as if the forest's animals and insects were asleep while they waited for night, like the snakes Bonchoo

had spoken of, but the night was a thought that she found important to avoid. What she had to face and accept was that Anu had slipped away into the forest, and Bonchoo had left without any satisfying explanation, filled with a hope that she couldn't share because what help could he find here, she wondered, and more important—would she be able to find Bonchoo if he didn't return, would he have cut a path with his machete that she could find?

To occupy herself she began carefully examining her surroundings, listing what her glance absorbed. "That," she said aloud in a low voice, "is a grove of bamboo, and there is a butterfly lovely such a tender pale cream color with wings tipped in brown. And along the fallen tree trunk there is a procession of ants going in and out of the hollow in the stump . . . the earth is red where there are bare patches, and there's some sort of ground cover over there and somewhere high above there must be the sky."

Abruptly Mornajay screamed, pointing a trembling hand at something she couldn't see, and it felt to her as if the jungle moved a little, shifted, as if his hallucinating disturbed its unseen occupants as acutely as it disturbed her.

Or had he truly seen something? She remembered the Ghosts of the Yellow Leaves and shivered; were they being watched by men of the forest who knew how to be invisible?

Mornajay's scream made them known just when they needed protective coloring, and her uneasiness mounted. She whispered, "I will count backward from ten to one . . . Mr. Mornajay, I'm going to count backward, try to hear me and please don't shout again . . . Ten . . . nine . . . eight."

A sound of rustling stirred the canopy of leaves overhead; she glanced up furtively and then around her and concentrated again on counting numbers, this time beginning at one hundred and working down, her glance often wandering to the watch on her wrist to count the minutes as they passed, each one assuming the shape of an eternity. Two o'clock arrived. She could feel Mornajay's body heat from where she sat, his whole body radiated heat and she wondered how long a human being could survive such a temperature, and where he had gone in the privacy of his delirium.

Aspirin, we ought to have aspirin, she thought. She had none with her, it was one of many items left behind in the hotel, but since it was possible that Mornajay carried some with him she crept over to his backpack to look. When she turned it over to open she found it surprisingly heavy. Unzipping it, she peered inside and then in astonishment she opened it wider: she was looking at a shortwave radio, which ex-

plained the weight of it, and at a smaller object wrapped in silk whose shape told her that it was a gun. She lifted out the gun and unwrapped it: it was a 41 magnum revolver. She stared at it for a long time: no pajamas, no aspirin but a radio and a quite lethal-looking automatic . . . this to find a lost monastery? She sat back on her heels, wondering what a man looking for a monastery would want with a radio. The revolver she could understand, considering that he'd come without a guide, claiming an experience in these mountains that implied he knew its dangers, but a radio suggested more than a safeguard against becoming lost. For one thing it was heavy; a compass and a map would be more sensible and she was finding neither. The radio implied a rendezvous, messages, other people and brought the nagging suspicion that Mornajay had lied to them about his purpose here.

It was certainly puzzling but she realized that her speculations were purely academic now because whoever Mornajay was, and whatever had brought him to these mountains, it looked very doubtful now that he would ever leave them. For this she pitied him, and with a sigh she carefully returned the radio and the revolver to his backpack. Returning to her place beside him, she began doggedly resuming her counting backward from one hundred back to one.

"Which is extremely tiresome," she complained, having accomplished this, and went on to perform the feat again. She had reached twenty when she heard the distant sound of a machete hacking away at branches, and then came the miracle of a voice. It was Bonchoo, calling to her.

"Bonchoo!" she cried, leaping to her feet. "Oh, Bonchoo—*Bonchoo*!"

He was returning . . . With tears in her eyes she watched his broad and bulky shape appear through the screen of trees and vines. He called out, "I have brought help!"

"Help?" she echoed, not understanding, and then to her astonishment she caught a glimpse of orange in the forest behind Bonchoo, and then another, and two verticals of orange turned into a pair of young men wearing orange—no, saffron, she amended—saffron robes. *"Monks?"* she gasped. She wanted to cry, she wanted to laugh, but with a semblance of calm she went to meet Bonchoo, and as he emerged from the tangles she grasped his hand. "I'm so glad to see you," she said, and promptly burst into tears.

Bonchoo, embarrassed, patted her shoulder. "How is Mornajay?"

"Worse," she sobbed and drew out a handkerchief and blew her nose. The two young monks walked into the clearing carrying a bamboo stretcher. They looked very young, still in their teens, their heads

shaved, smiles very white in their dark faces. "Where on earth did you find them?" she asked.

"Later," he said. "We must hurry while there is still hope."

The monks put down the stretcher next to Mornajay, placed fingertips together in a *wai* and bowed to her, then gently lifted Mornajay onto the stretcher.

"Where is Anu?" asked Bonchoo, looking around in surprise.

"Gone. He didn't catch up with you? He just *went*." She picked up Mornajay's camera and his sleeping bag and waited while Bonchoo absently picked up Mornajay's backpack.

"Not good," he said with a sigh. "He must have been scared the *naklengs* would come back and kill us all. Scared for himself, because if an Akha dies outside his village—" He shook his head. "They fear this most of all."

She said sadly, "Not finding the Shan camp frightens me most of all. Bonchoo, where are we taking Mornajay, where on earth do these monks come from?"

"You will see," Bonchoo said, brightening. "To find the temple—I scarcely dared hope, but the spirits of the forest are *go rooh nak* after all. It's a miracle. Six years ago when I was smuggling radios into Burma and was lost I stumbled across the ruins of this *wat* . . . we are very near to the border now."

"A ruined temple, and *inhabited*?" she said in awe.

"Only by the Acharya, a very holy man, and the few who come to learn from him, like these two." He added as they passed with Mornajay, "*He* might call it the lost monastery he seeks, who knows? Now I will go first, with the machete."

He went to work at once, widening the path for the stretcher, and they set out with Mrs. Pollifax following behind the two monks. A weight had been lifted, and she experienced an infinite relief that something could be done for Mornajay after all, and that if he must die it would be with a few amenities, and with a holy man present. They walked quickly; Bonchoo had cut a good path on his first journey and it was only occasionally that they had to stop for him to cut away more undergrowth. The gloom of the jungle was deepening, however, and Mrs. Pollifax shivered at the thought of darkness arriving before they found shelter. Overhead a faint breeze stirred the foliage; birds flew away at their approach; in this dim light she thought it was rather like moving through an aquarium that had lost the overhead rays of sun. They went so swiftly that it was a surprise to her when they suddenly walked out of the jungle's gloom into the golden sunlight of late afternoon.

She stopped in astonishment. Ahead of her three seated Buddha-

images rose out of the ground, massive in size and towering over the vegetation that already engulfed their base; three stone Buddhas seated in a row, at least twenty feet high, serene and dreamlike in their tranquility, each with lips curved in a tender smile, and here of all places, in the middle of a jungle. She gazed up at them in amazement, at their colors faded and weathered into dull shades of ocher and rust, at faces marred by erosion but still clear, and she wondered for how many centuries they had sat here in dreamlike contemplation, how many sunrise and sunsets they had watched come and go and how many civilizations as well. "How astonishing, how beautiful," she whispered.

The two young monks were just disappearing beyond the Buddhas but Bonchoo had stopped; he had slid to his knees, his hat removed, and he was bowing three times to the Buddhas, his face intent and reverent. This was a Bonchoo she'd not seen before and she waited, not wanting to encroach. When he rose to his feet he bowed a last time and she followed him past the huge stone images, feeling very small beneath them and still marveling at their being here. The path led into a tired-looking garden and seeing the temple beyond it she stopped again and stared.

Once it must have occupied many acres of ground but only a third of the building remained standing, and much of this in ruins. Its outer skin had been stripped away by time and erosion, leaving thick slabs of laterite that glowed brick-red in the sun, many of the stones hurled to the earth as if a giant fist had scattered them. With so much of the *wat* crumbled into dust and slab, almost all of the roofs had vanished, but where the walls remained standing the roofs had been replaced by intricate arrangements of bamboo and thatch, giving the impression of large untidy birds' nests dropped from the sky. From the walls that had survived, however, she could discern the shape of what had once existed here: two stone griffins still guarded a staircase that led up to a wide parapet, and beyond this rose the spire of a *chedi*, which must have been what Anu had seen when he climbed the bamboo half a mile away. Off to her left above the trees a brilliant orange sun was slowly sinking into the jungle.

Three stone Buddhas dreaming in a row . . . the ruins of an ancient temple . . . an orange sun . . . She was caught by the surprise of it, and by a feeling of enchantment that swept over her, as if she had stumbled into a space where time no longer existed. The isolation, her sense of discovery, the unexpected and powerful beauty of it held her spellbound. For a moment she, too, was released from time as she stood among the ghosts of the centuries, and with this there stole over her a sense of wonder that life had led her to this holy place, this temple guarding a past that was all but forgotten by the world. A movement on the parapet

caught her eye and she glanced up to see a man observing her. He was, she thought, the one detail that had been missing from the scene and which completed it, a man in a saffron robe, his head shaved; perhaps it was the holy man, she thought, but she was not close enough to see more, and once seen he vanished. With this she emerged from her trance and remembered why she was here.

She was alone. Bonchoo had disappeared and so had the two monks carrying Mornajay. She chose an arched entrance under the staircase and entered a long dark corridor. Following a sound of low voices she mounted narrow stone stairs that brought her to a room that was roofed with thatch and opened onto the parapet. The late sunshine filtered through the slats of bamboo in thin gold stripes. Mornajay lay restlessly on a mat, surrounded by Bonchoo and the two young monks. The man she had seen on the parapet had his back to her as he leaned over Mornajay examining him. She could not see his face but she could see that he was holding one of Mornajay's hands and gently squeezing the fingernails. He nodded and spoke to his two monks, who handed him a bowl and a cup.

Bonchoo, seeing her, rose and took her by the arm. "Come," he said, "it's better you not watch. While I went back for you there was time for the Acharya to make antidotes. Trust him, he is a very holy man."

"But what can he give Mornajay *here*?"

Bonchoo chuckled. "Just now it is *nguang chum, hua euang* and *krachao sida* boiled in water, does that help?"

"No," she said with a wan smile.

"Me either but this is what I am told. What *nguang chum* is I don't know some sort of herb only country people know but *hua euang* and *krachao sida* are kinds of orchids."

"But does he think Mornajay will live? I mean, it's surely been two hours at least!"

Bonchoo said gravely, "It will be decided by his karma but because it has been two hours and because he did not die the Acharya says it must have been weak poison."

"Weak! I shudder at the thought of a powerful dose! Does the holy man speak English?"

"A little, I think."

"Only a little—oh dear," she sighed.

They walked out onto the parapet into the soft cooling air. Here they were at eye level with the tops of the trees surrounding the clearing. The orange globe of sun had slipped into the forest, leaving the sky suffused with pink. A flock of rooks flew down and encircled a huge tree at the edge of the forest, swooping and diving and twittering until they settled

in among its leaves. A parrot protested their invasion and flew away with a flash of scarlet and green. As they stood and watched, the pink sky faded into a luminous mauve. Except for the birds and a few chickens scratching in the garden below, there was only the hush of twilight.

She dared at last to ask the question that concerned her. "We've lost Anu, Bonchoo. Are we near the Shan camp, could one of the young monks take us there in the morning, would they know where it is?"

Bonchoo hesitated and then he said carefully, "They are giving us a corner to sleep in tonight, and there will be food. We are interruptions," he told her, turning to look into her face. "We have brought the world here, *Koon* Emily. Of course the Acharya must know the Shan camp, but whether he will concern himself with such worldly matters I don't know. He is a very holy man. I think we must wait to present this problem to him in the morning, Mrs. Emily."

A second night, and tomorrow a third day . . . She stared unseeingly now into the jungle and thought how every hour made finding Cyrus more problematic. Yet Bonchoo was right, she conceded this; there was nothing that could be done now with night coming, nothing at all.

But holy man or not, she thought grimly, the Acharya *must* be persuaded to help them in the morning.

CHAPTER 13

SOMETIME IN THE NIGHT MRS. POLLIFAX GREW RESTLESS AND awoke to find that the jungle had awakened, too; a surging cacophony of cicadas rose from the forest, providing the backdrop for a confusion of other sounds: the fierce cry of a bird, a sudden, nearly human scream followed by a number of howls and then a drop in decibels to the steady drone of cicadas before the quarrels and conversations began again. Her gaze moved across walls striped with moonlight filtering through the roof of woven bamboo slats, and she thought automatically, *They'll have to repair that before the rainy season.*

Mornajay had quieted several hours ago. Turning her head, she could see his dark form lying only a few feet away from her, and Bonchoo curled up on his mat by the door—Bonchoo who had told her without the least chagrin that he would not be happy to sleep in a cubicle of his own because he might wake up in the night to find a ghost occupying the mat with him.

She had been very tired when she lay down and she was not sure whether it was the night sounds of the jungle that had waked her, the dull ache in her legs from yesterday's long walk, or the smallness of their evening meal, which had consisted of broth with a few noodles and scraps of chicken in it, and a bowl of rice. She had not seen the Acharya again. There appeared to be five novices on the premises, two of whom had prepared and brought them their dinner and had then withdrawn.

She thought, *There's no point in lying here and puzzling out why I'm awake . . . I'm awake.*

She crept over to Mornajay and placed a hand on his forehead, hoping his temperature might have fallen a notch or two, and for one awful moment believed he was dead; his flesh was cool. When she grasped his pulse and found it beating steadily she sat back on her heels and stared

down at him in amazement: his fever had broken, there were still miracles abroad, the Acharya's herbs had proved strong medicine or perhaps, as Bonchoo had said, it was not in Mornajay's karma to die today.

A loud snore from him abruptly changed her mood of awe; she smiled and left him to his sleep, found her shoes and tiptoed past Bonchoo out into the dark stone corridor. Emerging on the parapet, she met the beauty of a perfect full moon, a brilliant globe of light suspended like a lamp over mountains and jungle, outlining both in silhouette-form, like paper cutouts black against the night sky. The luminous light threw a silvery path across the parapet, made all the more brilliant by the black shadows of the monastery walls. It tipped the broken spire of the *chedi* with a ghostly silver light and turned the pockmarked gardens below into a bright moonscape. A bird called out from the jungle; the air was soft and cool on her face, and there were stars in the west so low and bright she felt she need only reach out to grasp one. She stood among the harlequin patterns of black and silver and looked for a long time at the sky.

With a glance at her watch it was one o'clock in the morning—she strolled to the left, rounded a corner and came to a stop, discovering that she was not alone. The Acharya was seated on the parapet at a point where the low wall had crumbled away; he sat calmly erect, his legs crossed under him in the full lotus position, hands folded in his lap as he gazed out at the jungle, the sky, the moon. He sat without movement, rooted there like one of the Buddha-images beyond the garden, his orange robe darkened by shadows but his profile clearly illuminated by the moonlight. It was a profile not unlike those etched on a Roman coin, lean, powerful, ascetic.

Without knowing why, without being able to explain her action, Mrs. Pollifax moved softly toward him until, some ten paces behind and to one side of him she too sat down, crossed her legs under her and closed her eyes . . . and almost at once, seated there, she became aware—and knew—that she truly did sit in the presence of a holy man because she had never before felt so at peace, or felt such love and serenity flowing into her from him. Time stood still again as she moved without thought through depths she'd never experienced before.

It ended only when her left foot protested against the weight of her right leg, for the lotus position was still unmanageable for her. The pain of it returned her to the moment, and opening her eyes she looked again at the Acharya's profile silhouetted against the trees beyond the parapet: he sat undisturbed. Glancing at her watch, she saw that an hour had passed, she had sat for that long a time. Silently she rose and left, and

returning to her mat on the floor, she lay down and slept deeply and restfully, utterly relaxed and without worry, until the sun reached her face.

Opening her eyes, she saw Bonchoo leaning over Mornajay.

"*Koon* Emily Mrs. Emily," he said in a whisper, "he sleeps, the fever has gone."

"Yes," she said drowsily, and sat up and rubbed her eyes. "Can you speak to the holy man now about finding the Shan camp, Bonchoo? We could get started soon, we must be very near it."

Bonchoo nodded. "I could, yes, I am more hopeful. He has had the *namjai* to feed and shelter us, he may have the *namjai* to help us."

"What does *namjai* mean?"

He grinned. "To turn into English would be 'water of the heart.' " He rolled up his mat, placed it in a corner and vanished down the corridor.

Oh, for a toothbrush, lamented Mrs. Pollifax. She reached into her purse for a comb and was about to begin her morning ablutions when she saw that Mornajay's eyes were open. "Good morning," she said, and went to him.

Mornajay stared at her, ran a tongue over his lips and tried to speak. His voice was a whisper. "Thank you."

She nodded. "You're a very lucky man, Mr. Mornajay, but I'm not the one to thank."

His eyes moved to the thatched roof and he frowned. "Where am I? What has happened?"

"Well, I think you've found your lost monastery," she told him with a smile.

"My what?"

"Your lost monastery. You said you were looking for a lost monastery."

"I was?" He looked puzzled. "How did I get here?"

"Better you sleep," she told him, patting his arm. "Just sleep and get well, there's time later to—"

"Time!" His eyes opened wide and he struggled to sit up, stirred by some inexplicable urgency. "What day? What date is this? Please important!"

"Let me think a minute," she said. "Yes, this would have to be Saturday morning, which makes it the nineteenth of January."

"Good all right, then. Yes—sleep. Get strong." He smiled faintly. "Never so weak before. Dysentery? Malaria? Typhoid?"

She laughed. "I don't think you'd believe me if I told you, Mr. Mornajay. Just sleep and be glad."

"Glad," he murmured and closed his eyes. "Yes, glad," he repeated and fell asleep.

She came closest to liking him at this moment. He was not an easy man to like, she thought: stiff, cold, estranged, concealing every hint of the vulnerability that she was seeing now. She thought he would be a happier and better person if he acknowledged his humanness instead of keeping it sealed up inside of him. On the other hand, she thought, one could never know the traumas that shaped such people; everyone carried around with them their own particular defenses, antagonisms, secrets and uncertainties, and if Mornajay seemed to carry an unusually heavy load of them he at least, she thought with humor, wore beautiful clothes, and very expensive ones.

She left Mornajay to search for food. They had slept late, it was nearly nine o'clock, and she supposed that in a temple or monastery this was very late indeed; the Acharya had no doubt been up since dawn, or perhaps had not slept at all. She found the kitchen, or what she assumed to be the kitchen because the room held a circle of bricks on the stone floor, with the embers of a fire still glowing, and a large lacquered bowl with rice soaking in it. Two kettles hung neatly from a peg on the wall; there was a shelf with eight carved wooden bowls on it, and eight empty mason jars. In a corner stood a small pile of kindling for the fire, and above it a finger of bananas hanging from a nail. She removed one and hungrily ate it standing there.

Finding no one at all, not even Bonchoo, she returned to the parapet and descended the lion-guarded staircase to the garden, following a path that led to a stand of trees in the rear. A well stood here in the shade, efficiently made of cement, with a primitive pump and an intricate series of bamboo pipes to carry water into the nether regions of the monastery. A cluster of unused bamboo pipes lay about like jackstraws, and seeing the ditches that threaded the bare garden, she realized that in the planting season those pipes would be attached to the well and would feed water to the garden, irrigating the rice and vegetables.

As she neared the well she saw Bonchoo sitting on its step, looking gloomy.

"Bonchoo!" she called.

He made room for her and she sat down beside him. "Did you find the Acharya?"

He pointed to three saffron robes hanging from the branch of a tree. "Yes, he was doing his laundry. Now he has gone to teach boys in one of the rooms."

"And?"

He turned to her with a melancholy sigh. "He will meditate on it; he says he cannot encourage anger against the Shans, he does not —with-

out meditating on it, you understand—feel he can show us where they may be."

"And when is he going to meditate on it?" she demanded. "You said he'd gone off to *teach*?"

Bonchoo nodded.

"This shocks me," she said quietly. "I don't understand it when he was kind enough to help Mornajay."

Bonchoo lifted his hat, rubbed his head, sighed and placed his hat more squarely on his head. "He says he lives here in peace and harmony with the mountain people. He teaches reading to the young men who come here, he serves the Thai people who find their way here, he feeds the bandits and gives shelter to the insurgents, and benediction to smugglers as well as to soldiers who pass by. He does not judge because every man has the Buddha nature."

She said hotly, "That's all very well, but did you explain that those neighbors of his with the Buddha nature have kidnapped my husband and may very well kill him, and that two of them have tried to kill you?"

He turned and looked at her. He said gravely, "It is most difficult. We bring him a man poisoned by an arrow, we ask help, he knows nothing of us except that we bring violence with us. We must wait. He is a holy man, *Koon* Emily. He will meditate on it; if it is his karma to help, he will help."

"How will he know?" she said bitterly.

"He will know." Frowning over this, Bonchoo said earnestly, "Even I can see if he takes us to a secret camp something changes here. He must be a man trusted with many secrets. I can be sad, but do not despair, Mrs. Emily. If the Acharya refuses us we can still set out alone, the two of us. Anu said south—"

"Could one of the young monks be persuaded to guide us?"

"Only if he asked them to," Bonchoo said sorrowfully.

"And would it be dangerous, just the two of us?"

He said dryly, "Only if we cannot find the trail, or the way back if we become lost."

She nodded and rose. "I will speak to the holy man myself. You said he spoke some English?"

"Quite much, really."

"Oh? Where can I find him?"

Bonchoo gestured toward the building. "He went in."

She found the classroom, a long room, very dim and bare, the only points of light the brilliant sunshine framed in the squares of two windows, whose shutters had been thrown back for the light, and the brightness of the five orange robes worn by the novices. Four of them lay on

the floor turning the pages of a manuscript; the fifth sat cross-legged beside them, reciting in a sing-song voice. He glanced up at Mrs. Pollifax and smiled. She returned his smile but left because the Acharya was not among them.

She found him at last in the kitchen, ladling out the rice that she had seen soaking on her earlier visit. He was ladling it with a spoon into a steamer made of woven bamboo. Hearing her, he turned, and for the first time she was seeing him face to face. She thought how conditioned one became to seeing hair on a person's head, and yet a shaved head certainly placed emphasis on the face, and what a striking face his was. He did not look at all Asian: French, perhaps, she thought, or not familiar with the Burmese he was perhaps a Burman. If he was a Thai then his blood had been well mixed with Caucasian for many generations. It was a very strong face—strong, *strong*, she repeated the skin brown but whether from birth or the sun it was hard to guess. The eyes were brown, too, soft and penetrating. She wondered if he had been aware of her presence during the night when she had sat behind him in the moonlight. "Do you speak English?" she asked.

"Not lately," he said in a pleasant voice without accent, "but, yes, I know English."

And speaks it very well, she thought in surprise. Speaking slowly, she said, "My name is Emily Pollifax and I'm a tourist from the United States visiting your country. I came with my husband, and now I've lost him."

He nodded attentively.

"He was placed in a car against his will—in Chiang Mai," she told him, watching his face to be sure that he understood. "And Bonchoo and I followed this car."

He nodded.

"Twice," she went on, indignation creeping into her voice, "twice men have tried to kill us. Once on the road and once here in the jungle. It's these men who have abducted my husband, or friends of theirs. We've been told that the Shan could be taking him to a camp nearby. We beg your help. To find the camp, to find my husband."

He said gently, "Food and shelter and healing I give freely to anyone who comes here. But to direct you to the Shan camp would betray the people I live among, it would betray their trust, especially if you wish them harm."

"I wish them no harm," she told him, beginning to feel desperate. "What harm could Bonchoo and I bring them? I just want my husband!"

He looked puzzled. "But what do they want of Mr. Pollifax?"

"*Not* Pollifax," she said impatiently, "his name is Reed—Cyrus

Reed and as to what they want—" She stopped in midsentence because she saw that she had startled him.

"Cyrus Reed?" he repeated. "You say you are American?"

"Yes, from Connecticut, and for myself I say again that I wish no harm to the Shans, I just want Cyrus *back*." She would have said more but he held up his hand for silence, turned away from her and picked up the wooden ladle again. She stood and watched impatiently as he spooned wet rice into the steamer; her impatience began turning into anger as he added more kindling to the wood set under the wok, relighted the fire and added a pinch of salt to the rice.

When he turned back to her his face was impassive. He said in a strange, nearly sing-song voice, "I will have Prasert show you where the camp is but . . . when the sun is higher, after we have eaten rice."

She could scarcely believe it. She realized that she'd been holding her breath and now she expelled it in a long sigh of relief. She could have hugged him, she would at least have liked to shake his hand but he stood stiffly, very formal now, his face shuttered. She said with feeling, "Thank you, thank you *very* much."

He nodded and turned back to his work.

To Bonchoo she said triumphantly, her heart singing, "We leave after we've eaten rice."

Happily now she wandered, the monastery suddenly a different place, an experience that she must tell Cyrus about she did not allow herself to think he might not be found today and so she roamed freely from room to room, walking around the ruins, examining the irrigation system in the garden, entering the building again by a small arched doorway she'd not seen before, and finding a room that she'd not seen before.

It was a small room, and very plain: a mat for sleeping, a low table with a candle, a shelf, the roof a screen of woven bamboo through which the sun sent spangles and sequins of light. One of these spangles of light fell on a second shelf on which stood a few books and Mrs. Pollifax, deciding that this must be the Acharya's room, moved toward the books, curious as to what a holy man would read in this isolated corner of the world.

There were six books, three of them very old, their pages tied together between boards, and from the exotic loops of print she guessed they were manuscripts written in Thai, or Pali, the language of Buddhism. The fourth book's title was in French French, she murmured, startled—and then turning to the last two books she was delighted to find that both were in English, a worn paperback of Shakespeare's

Tragedies, the other a dog-eared hardcover copy of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. Her hand went out to the last two and then drew back: *I shouldn't be here*, she thought, *I shouldn't have entered this room and invaded the Acharya's privacy.*

On the other hand, she thought, *I did, and I'm here*, and because she loved the book *Kim*, too, and because the copy looked the most used, most read and most loved of them all, she reached out for it and took it down from the shelf.

It was a child's edition of the book, with illustrations by a long-ago artist familiar to her from her own childhood; she had never seen an illustrated copy before and she turned the pages, smiling, until she reached the frontispiece on which an inscription had been printed.

In a child's block letters she read:

MY BOOK.
FROM MAMA ON MY BIRTDAY.
JOHN LLOYD MATTHEWS.

CHAPTER 14

DOWN THE DARK STONE CORRIDOR SHE FLED, RETURNING THE WAY she had come, and breaking into a run when she saw the arched doorway ahead. Outside in the bright sun she sat down in the shade of the well and caught her breath. She told herself that the inscription in the book was meaningless, that John Lloyd Matthews had spent years—decades—in Thailand before he disappeared, and that once he'd been declared legally dead it was only natural that some of his possessions had remained in the country to make their way into the marketplace and be sold to strangers.

A man like the Acharya would certainly appreciate a used copy of *Kim*, found in a bookstall or bazaar. The book had not had to travel far, after all, because John Lloyd Matthews had disappeared in Chiang Mai.

He had been Cyrus's friend, she remembered, and he had been abducted, too, or so they believed, and she could certainly see now how easily it could be done.

She thought, *Perhaps Matthews was reading the book when he was abducted, and his murderers brought it into the mountains and someone left it with the Acharya. Or perhaps . . .*

Still shaken by the inscription she thought, *Stop—stop and look at this sensibly!*

But it was impossible to sort out the astonished thoughts bombarding her: the Acharya did not look Thai, or Chinese, or even Asian, and he spoke excellent English. The holy man had told Bonchoo that he could not help them because he lived in peace with his neighbors. When she had accosted him herself he had repeated this, telling her very flatly that he couldn't help them, and then . . . NOT *Mr. Pollifax*, she had flung at him, *his name is Cyrus Reed.*

And abruptly everything had changed, he had looked startled and

turned away, and when he turned back he had agreed to let one of the monks guide them to the Shan camp.

Cyrus had said, *We grew up together, same high school in Connecticut, we called him Joker Matthews.*

Cyrus Reed, the Acharya had repeated, and then, *You are American?*

Bishop had said, *There was never any clue to what happened, the theory now is that he was abducted for ransom, struggled and was killed and buried in the jungle.*

My book. From mama on my birtday. John Lloyd Matthews.

Impossible, she thought.

She emerged from her convoluted thoughts to realize that Bonchoo was calling to her from the parapet. She called back, "Yes?"

"I have given *Nai* Mornajay rice water; he took it very well," he shouted down to her. "Now it is time for us to eat."

"Yes," she said and stood up, resolutely putting aside her turbulent thoughts for later. What was important now, dwarfing any foolish speculations about the Acharya, was that after they ate their rice they would set out for the Shan camp, and her heart beat faster with a sickening suspense as to whether they would find Cyrus there.

The Acharya did not eat his rice with them.

"How did you find the Acharya?" she asked Prasert as they seated themselves on the floor to eat. Doubtfully she regarded the bowls of food in front of her: there was the ubiquitous sticky-rice and pot of tea, but a bowl of fried prawns had been added today, which Mrs. Pollifax contemplated with enthusiasm until she realized that this modest offering had to be shared with five monks and Bonchoo. "And what made you decide to be a monk?"

"But we are novices, not monks," Prasert told her, turning to his three friends to translate this. "Me, I come here from very small, very poor village in the mountains—two hours' walk from here—and what I wish for is to become English-speaking tour guide, very important nice job! It is the abbot in my small village who send me," he explained. "Because the Acharya can teach me good English, and the Five Precepts, too."

Mrs. Pollifax picked out of the bowl her second and last prawn and molded rice into a ball to follow it. "But how did the abbot find the Acharya?"

"Ah," said Prasert, beaming at her, "he once spend three days here to learn from him and speak to him."

"How long ago?" she asked quickly.

Prasert shrugged. "This I do not know. Maybe nobody know when the Acharya come here; he is—what is word? very secret."

Bonchoo said dryly, "And to find him it is necessary to be lost in the forest, I think."

"Yes, yes," Prasert said, nodding and laughing. "That is just how my abbot find him, this holy one no longer tied to the wheel."

Mrs. Pollifax nodded. "Detached," she said, and put down her bowl of rice, conceding her lack of appetite. "But I am *very* attached to life just now and filled with a desire to find my husband. I'm anxious to leave," she told Bonchoo. "While you finish I'll tell Mornajay that we're going."

She found Mornajay no longer lying on his mat but standing up and taking a few experimental steps. He glanced up at her arrival, his face damp with sweat, and managed a weak smile; she could only imagine what this effort was costing him.

"Have to get my strength back," he said and headed for his mat where he sank down and wiped his forehead with his sleeve, no longer the immaculate Mornajay but as dusty and wrinkled as she and Bonchoo.

"I hope you'll keep in mind that you've been very ill," she told him. "We really didn't think you'd pull through, you know. You need rest."

He nodded and glanced toward the door, a sadness falling across his face so that she wondered what he was seeing; whatever it was, it had to be in his mind's eye because there was no one in the corridor. Aware of her again he said curtly, "I've no time for rest."

"I came to tell you that we're leaving."

He heard this with indifference. "That husband of yours, I suppose." He added politely, "I thank you for your help."

"You're entirely welcome," she said with equal politeness, and left him.

Bonchoo and Prasert were waiting for her at the base of the staircase to the garden, chatting amiably together in Thai. She smiled at the picture they made, Prasert in his dull orange gown, head shaven, Bonchoo wearing his absurd English-gentleman's hat that appeared even more of an anachronism in this remote jungle monastery. Prasert flashed a bright smile at her. "We go?"

"We go," she said, and turned to look up at the parapet where she had first glimpsed the Acharya. "The holy man is not to be thanked?"

"He is in meditation, please." Leading them through the stubble of the garden, he suddenly stopped and made a sweeping gesture with his hand. "But he go with us, you understand? His spirit, I think, it travels everywhere, like a *nohk*!" With a vivacious laugh he turned and led them around the well and past a storage bin and toward the forest.

"Like a bird," translated Bonchoo behind her.

She did not feel the Acharya's presence at all, either as a bird or a holy one, and Prasert's allusion made her rather cross. The inscription in the Acharya's book still haunted her at one level but ever since he'd announced they would be guided to the Shan camp, after all, she had been experiencing a mixture of high anticipation and high anxiety that overrode everything else, and which felt as prickly and uncomfortable as a hair shirt; she suspected that she was having an anxiety attack. She was wondering how she had ever come to believe that Cyrus would be taken to this particular Shan camp; she was remembering now that this was based on a supposition of Nouvak's in the Akha village, but there could be other camps in other places, or he could have been taken over the mountains into Burma, and they would be too late. She had never liked the words *too late*, and today they were frightening. Her mood was not lightened when Bonchoo asked Prasert how far the camp was, and Prasert said it was only forty minutes away from them. That they had been so close all this time!

Obviously the camp was not accessible, however, for as they entered the forest again it was to encounter a labyrinth of paths. Prasert almost went out of his way to pull aside the limb of a tree or a shrub and to reveal the thread of a path going off at a tangent, and then he would turn and guide them up a different trail and down another. Only once did they encounter a real trail such as they had traveled to and from the Akha village, a trail wide enough for mules or donkeys. Crossing it, she heard Bonchoo muttering in a low voice behind her.

She turned. "What?"

He gave her a wry smile. "I think Prasert has been told to take us in circles."

"That's what I think, too."

"It will be hard to find the way back, *Koon* Emily."

"Very," she said tartly, certain suspicions mounting. She wondered if, like Hansel and Gretel, she might find some means of marking their route but she soon gave up this idea; unlike Cyrus she did not possess any scraps of paper, not even one with the eye of a sardine on it; she had given away her lipstick, her square of Thai silk was wrapped around her healing foot and all that remained were the coins in her purse, and the votive. Of stones there were none, for these paths were soft with decayed wood and almost springy to the step. They were also walking uphill again now and she could only hope that it was not a mountain that lay ahead because her current diet of rice was not particularly fortifying. She thought wistfully of baked potatoes filled with melting butter and sprinkled with salt and pepper; to this she added slices of hot roast beef

swimming in juices, and fresh asparagus, and she was about to consider a dessert —strawberry shortcake, perhaps— when she halted her fantasy, accusing herself of being just another spoiled American. She could admire Prasert, for instance, whose very leanness spoke of wiry, coiled-up energy, and Bonchoo, who was broad and muscular, and she reminded herself that their energy was extracted from the very rice that left her unsatisfied, and therefore . . .

Prasert had stopped, and so abruptly that she ran into him. She looked up from her fantasizing and her scoldings and saw that he stood at the crest of a hill. He pointed and she looked down at a long strip of cleared land lying below them in the sun, a glade in which stood a cluster of dusty palm-and-bamboo sheds and huts in an empty compound.

"Shan camp," he said.

"Yes," she said, blinking.

At that moment a man in khaki uniform walked out of a hut and crossed the compound and she felt a stab of fear; she'd forgotten this was a military camp. She watched the man disappear into a hut on the right, and now she saw that a man with a rifle was seated on a bench in the shade, and that another soldier sat beside the door of the farthest hut, almost obscured by the deep shadow of its roof.

Turning to Prasert, she said, "Tell us how to get back to the monastery."

He said firmly, "You do not go back."

"Not go back?" she said indignantly. "Where do we go, then, and why *not* the monastery?"

He led them back a few steps and pointed to a tree that had been bleached and smoothed by weather until it gleamed white, its dead branches lifted as if in supplication, a tree that should long since have fallen but had been held upright by the dense growth around it. He said, "There is a trail here, do you see? It will take you south to the river where there is a boat."

"*River?*" she echoed.

Surprised, Bonchoo said, "You mean the Mae Kok River? We're that near to Tha Ton, then?" To Mrs. Pollifax he said, "I have been there!"

"But what's Tha Ton?"

"A small village on the Mae Kok, it's on the Thai-Burma border, and it is true, a boat can be hired there. How far?" he asked Prasert.

She wanted to ask again why they were being barred from a return to the monastery but it had already become obvious that the Acharya did not wish to see her there again, or perhaps, she thought, it was Cyrus whom he wished to avoid seeing if she was fortunate enough to have

Cyrus with her. *From mama . . . on my birtday. . . .* She shook herself free of this thought and concentrated on what Prasert was saying.

"Two hours' walk, and the boat will take you " Prasert made wild, expressive motions with one hand and smiled. "To Chiang Rai!" Turning toward the glade, he added, "You must not go beyond last hut down there or you will not be in Thailand, you understand? They do not like spies here so I wish you *chohk dee*—good luck!"

With that ominous announcement he pressed his fingertips together and made a *wai*, walked down the trail and disappeared from sight.

She and Bonchoo looked at each other. "Well, Bonchoo," she said.

"Yes, *Koon* Emily," he sighed.

They edged gingerly toward the rim of the hill and crouched behind a screen of tall grass to study what lay below them. There were five buildings: a long one facing them, an open shed on their right with a small hut beside it, and two below them, the five arranged in horseshoe fashion, open to the south where a circle of bare earth suggested a landing pad.

Mrs. Pollifax, pointing, said, "For helicopters?"

Bonchoo nodded. "I think yes. For big shots from Chiang Mai, maybe."

She nodded and resumed her observations and saw not without a sigh—that the time had come for her to repay her considerable debt to Bonchoo. If she were alone, she thought, she would have chosen to reconnoiter, to approach the camp by stealth, perhaps from the other side where she could hide behind the longest building and listen and watch for signs of a prisoner. If Cyrus was there she would have found a way to free him so that they could vanish into the forest before he was missed and she was seen. Or so she reflected, knowing the risks but knowing, too, how often inspiration arrived under pressure. Unfortunately this was impossible because of Bonchoo, who needed to explain and to vindicate himself to the Shans here, needed to describe how Jacoby had lied about him so that he would have a future again. And so since she was heavily indebted to Bonchoo, she concentrated instead on what they must do instead, which was to openly walk down the hill to the camp and trust that they wouldn't be shot by a guard before they reached it.

"I count six men now," she said to Bonchoo.

"But no Red Shirt?" he said uneasily.

"No red or yellow shirts—mercifully," she told him, but also, she was thinking, no sign of Cyrus.

Five of the men crossed the compound to the small hut on their right,

leaving one on guard by the door. She said doubtfully, "I suppose we should go now, don't you? Before the other men come outside again?"

Bonchoo said gloomily, "They will come outside anyway."

"True . . . Is there a cold wind blowing down your spine, Bonchoo?"

"Very cold. I am most scared, and you?"

"Scared very," she admitted, and thought that she had never before felt so far from home, so far from everything familiar to her.

Bonchoo said, "We have a proverb, 'The mane is proof of a real lion.' We must be very *dtoh*—very big just now." He stood and held out his hand to her. "Come," he said, "we must be real lions."

CHAPTER 15

In Langley, Virginia, Bishop had begun to feel that some progress was being made: a woman answering to Mrs. Pollifax's description had been seen Thursday morning at a development called Hot Springs, about an hour's drive out of Chiang Mai, and to the north of it. She'd been seen in the company of a man who was either Thai or Chinese, and who wore an odd hat. They appeared to have done some arguing but they had shared boiled eggs—this was baffling—and had then driven away in a truck.

Both the eggs and the odd hat—especially the hat—intrigued Bishop but he'd not dared to interrupt the phone call that had brought them their first news of Mrs. Pollifax. What was almost as surprising was that it was McAndrews who had unearthed this information, and entirely on his own. Carstairs had said with satisfaction, "He's shaping up."

Following this, however, the news was not as good. McAndrews had continued driving northward, and about an hour south of Chiang Rai he'd noticed a blue van abandoned at the side of the road and had stopped to inspect it. There was no way of knowing if it was the blue van into which Cyrus had been crammed, but in any case it was empty. At the police blockade outside of Chiang Rai no one had seen a truck, a man in an odd hat, Mrs. Pollifax, or for that matter a blue van.

Apparently Carstairs had been impressed enough by McAndrews's enterprise to give him a fresh assignment. "Since you're already in Chiang Rai," he'd said, "I want you to drive on to Chiang Saen now it's not far—and look up a man named Jacoby. So far you've shared your discoveries with the Thai police but this errand is strictly hush-hush, McAndrews, you understand? Chiang Saen's a small village and it shouldn't be difficult to locate him."

"Jacoby," McAndrews repeated solemnly. "Yes, sir."

"You recall the dead man you found in the hut yesterday?"

In a burst of candor McAndrews confessed that it was the first dead person he'd ever seen and that he was not likely to forget.

"Well, the dead man's name was Ruamsak," Carstairs told him, "and he's reported to have had dealings with Jacoby. That's R-U-A-M-S-A-K," he said, spelling it for him. "There could be a clue here as to where Mr. Reed's being taken, or where his wife's heading. Find out from Jacoby who Ruamsak's enemies were, and what the hell he may know or guess about this. Jacoby's done some work for us in the past so you can mention the Department, and considering his circumstances" Carstairs did not elaborate—"you can offer him a reasonable sum of money for any information. Fifty dollars American should do it. Got that?"

McAndrews said eagerly, "Yes, sir."

"And report back to me as soon as humanly possible."

Now they waited for that return call, but because it had been eleven at night when they'd heard from McAndrews they were faced with any number of annoying obstacles: the difficulties of his finding Jacoby in the middle of the night in a sleeping village, and even of his finding a telephone from which to call them during the night if he *should* find Jacoby.

In the meantime an imperturbable Carstairs was setting fresh inquiries in motion: he had called Holloway in Bangkok again, in an attempt to learn with whom Mornajay had been drinking his margarita at the Indiana 500 on Wednesday night. Holloway had promised to make inquiries but the man's back was all that he himself had seen of him, and he reminded Carstairs that forty-eight hours had passed and it was not likely that any of his employees would remember two men sharing a brief drink that long ago.

"Try anyway, will you?" Carstairs asked casually. "Could be a breakthrough for us."

"Sure thing."

Bishop, handling two messages from Bashir Ilariyo in the Sudan, returned to Carstairs's office to find him staring thoughtfully at their detail map of Thailand on the wall. He said, "There's got to be more that we can do, damn it, there should even be some way to stop Mornajay if he's planning to disappear . . . If Thomson feels he's heading north into the mountains—in which case he'd be somewhere in this area—" His hand swept across the northern corner of Thailand and he scowled, his voice trailing away doubtfully. With a shake of his head he returned to

his desk and picked up his cup of coffee, still frowning. "Inspiration badly needed, Bishop!"

"Well, at least there's news about the coup," Bishop told him. "It seems to be stalemated. Apparently this General Lueng is hoping or expecting the rest of the main army to join with him, but so far it's not happening."

Carstairs nodded absently, his thoughts elsewhere. He said abruptly, "See if you can reach Thomson again at the DEA, will you? An idea arrives, and I'd rather talk to a man I know than try contacting the DEA in Chiang Mai."

Bishop put through the call, waited for Thomson to be found, handed the phone to Carstairs and listened with interest. After an exchange of pleasantries Carstairs said, "You've notified whoever's in charge in Chiang Mai, Thomson, but I'm wondering if more could be done. They're making inquiries on the ground, so to speak?" He halted, listening, and nodded. "Following through on your guess that Mornajay's headed into the mountains, and into Burma, how about sending a couple of men in a helicopter to patrol the borders? I realize it's a small and feeble hope at best, but—what?"

He listened and made a face. "Doesn't anyone know when he'll be back? How about borrowing a helicopter?" He sighed. "Frustrating. Yes, I know you're terribly understaffed too many budget cuts again . . . Keep me posted, will you?"

He hung up. "Damn," he said. "You heard that? Thomson had already hoped for reconnaissance but their best man, a pilot by the name of Callahan, flew off yesterday to the north on an inspection tour and they can't make radio contact with him."

"But he'd surely tune in sometime," Bishop protested.

Carstairs gave him a reproachful glance. "Not if he's on the ground and not in the air."

"Oh," said Bishop meekly.

Carstairs sighed and glanced at his watch. "Let's hope we hear soon from—" He broke off at sight of a red light flashing on the telephone and picked up the receiver. His face brightened. "It's McAndrews," he said in an aside to Bishop. "Get this on tape!"

Bishop flicked on the machine and picked up the other phone to listen. Almost at once he winced: McAndrews's voice came through absurdly loud, and he was upset again.

"Slow down," Carstairs told him sharply, "you're incoherent, I can't understand you. Have you found Jacoby?"

The voice choked. "Yes, sir—that is, no, sir."

Carstairs snapped, "Well, which, for heaven's sake?"

"Both," cried McAndrews, and blurted out, "He's dead, Mr. Carstairs, I found him dead. Somebody shot him, he must have been dead at least two days. It was awful, I mean the place reeked "

"Steady," said Carstairs gently. "Bad luck, two bodies inside of two days . . . take your time."

"Yes, sir." McAndrews drew a deep breath and said more calmly, "It was especially awful because he couldn't have weighed more than ninety pounds and his skin was a terrible shade of green. Did you know he was an opium addict? All the equipment was there."

"Yes," Carstairs said quietly. "For nearly fifteen years, I believe. We knew."

"I see . . . well, sir " and here a touch of pride entered McAndrews's voice. "*This* time, sir—this time I remembered to make inquiries right away. I asked around and I've a description for you of the last man seen going into his guesthouse. I mean, he was *seen*. Two days ago, in broad daylight."

"Good work, McAndrews, let's have it."

"First of all he was American, sir."

"American?"

"Yes, a well-built man, six feet tall with broad shoulders, a large pale face, long jaw, well dressed, with a head of curly gray hair. A *mop* of curly gray hair someone called it."

Across the desk Carstairs and Bishop exchanged glances. "I see," Carstairs told him smoothly. "And a very good job you've done, McAndrews. Now I want you to forget everything you've told me and go back to your computers in Bangkok. We'll take over from here."

When Carstairs hung up Bishop said grimly, "Mornajay seems to be cutting quite a swath, doesn't he!"

Carstairs scarcely heard him. "Get Thomson on the phone again and tell him our man was sighted in the north two days ago, we've a description of him from Chiang Saen."

Bishop nodded but as he walked toward the door to his office he paused beside the map of Thailand on the wall and stared at it. If Mrs. Pollifax and her companion had never passed the police blockade, he was thinking, then somewhere between Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai they had vanished from a highway that ran through the mountains and was surrounded by jungle, and because he could see no secondary roads entering that highway he had the uneasy feeling that she must have forsaken the road for the jungle, or for reasons unknown had been forced into it. He placed his finger on the general area where she had disappeared, and then he moved his finger to the village of Chiang Saen and drew a line between it and the route that Mornajay would take to enter

Wen Sa's territory, and his uneasiness deepened. With a passion that surprised him he hoped that if Mrs. Pollifax had entered the jungle she was not going to encounter a man whose desperate attempt to escape had already claimed its first victim.

CHAPTER 16

THE PATH WOUND LAZILY DOWN TO THE SHAN CAMP THROUGH scrub and grass, with only a few trees to screen their advance. It made for a terrifyingly exposed approach, but like a lion she would be, vowed Mrs. Pollifax, and she took the lead, keeping an eye on the guard seated by the door to the hut. He seemed oblivious to them, his foot tapping the ground as if to some cosmic music until, as they drew nearer, she saw the cord running to his ear and understood that Walkmans had arrived here, too. They were fortunate: they had actually reached the base of the hill before the guard sensed movement, turned his head and saw them. With a shout he jumped to his feet, his fellow soldiers shouted back, the door to the hut opened and by the time she and Bonchoo reached the center of the compound a circle of rifles and men brought them to a stop.

The soldiers looked more like boys than men but she could see that they took their work very seriously. She said firmly, in a loud voice, "I have come to ask if my husband is here," and she was pleased to discover that her voice did not tremble in the least.

She was stared at blankly; their only response was to press several rifles deeper into her back, making uncomfortable inroads on her spine.

"I do not think they speak English," Bonchoo whispered. "Let me try Thai, *Koon* Emily."

She shook her head; obviously there was only one solution, and clearing her throat of dust, Mrs. Pollifax shouted, "Cyrus! . . . Cyrus?"

Rifles dug more aggressively into her spine, and there were troubled, angry mutterings but from a distance, muted but unmistakably familiar, there came a shout, "Emily . . . ? My God, *Emily*?"

"Cyrus!" she gasped. Recklessly she pushed away rifles and men, broke out of the circle and ran toward the long hut with the closed door. Shouts followed her, a bullet whistled over her head and another one

kicked up the dust to the left of her. She flung open the door, momentarily blinded by the darkness of the interior. "Cyrus?" she faltered.

A wonderfully familiar shape started toward her from the shadows, took several steps and then tripped over a rope that tied him to a post. *"Emily!"*

He held out his arms and she flew into them, bursting into sobs of relief as she tightly hugged the warmth of him. "Oh, Cyrus," she sobbed, "I thought—I was afraid I thought any minute they might—"

"Not yet," he said, kissing the top of her head. "Waiting for someone who speaks English to find out who I am."

"Thank heaven they waited," she gasped. "Thank God they didn't shoot you first."

"Wouldn't find out who I am, then," he pointed out reasonably.

She laughed through her tears. "Understatement!" Flinging back her head to look into his face, she said, "But are you all right, Cyrus, they didn't harm you?"

"Hell of a long walk," he said gruffly. "A little tired –and damn hungry, I can tell you." He looked down at her tenderly. "Worried terribly about you, Emily. Afraid you'd follow, afraid you wouldn't . . . the more distance we traveled the more I worried no place for you alone in these mountains."

"But I wasn't alone," she told him. "I didn't know they waited for someone who speaks English, and you didn't know that I traveled with Bonchoo. Bonchoo's outside, Cyrus, he's been such a friend –although actually, of course, he's Ruamsak."

"He is?"

"Was," she amended, "because Ruamsak's dead."

Cyrus laughed. "Not sure I quite follow that. My God, Emily, I thought I'd never see you again, except—"

"Yes?" Her eyes adjusting to the darkness now, she could see that his face had sobered. "What is it, Cyrus?"

He shook his head. "Have to tell you, m'dear, I've thought and thought plenty of time for *that* here—and can't see any way out of this. And now you here, too, and this Ruamsak—"

"No, *Bonchoo*," she reminded him.

"—and that's three of us. No embassy to appeal to, no police, no one knowing where we are . . ."

The door opened and four soldiers strode in, filling the space with khaki and rifles. The word *out* was unknown but their rifles spoke for them; untying Cyrus, they separated them, poked, prodded and pushed them to the door, and now it was the bright sunlight that made Mrs. Pollifax blink as she left the dark hut. Shading her eyes, she looked for

Bonchoo and saw him sitting despondently on the bench where the original guard had sat; he was staring gloomily at two rifles trained on him by a pair of zealous young soldiers, but at sight of Mrs. Pollifax his face brightened.

"I try to tell them why we are here but they do not speak much Thai, either." His gaze moving to Cyrus, he said, "Oh—big, very big!"

Since it was to this bench they were being taken, Bonchoo moved over to make room for them. "Much bigger than last seen!" he announced.

Startled, Cyrus said, "You've seen me before?"

"Yes, yes pushed into blue van in Chiang Mai, sir."

"You've been together that long, then!"

Bonchoo started to reply but from the hill on the Burma side of the compound a voice shouted, "Hü!"

"Hü," shouted back a soldier and all of them snapped to attention as two men rode into the camp, one on horseback, one on a donkey, one of them in uniform, the other—

"Red Shirt!" gasped Mrs. Pollifax.

"Trouble," groaned Bonchoo.

"Let's hope one of them speaks English," Cyrus said fervently.

"The other is very big-shot officer," Bonchoo said. "Look, he rides a *horse*."

"Wen Sa?" she suggested.

"*Somebody* high up—see his leather boots, real leather they look. No sandals for him! *Pu yai ban*."

"Who's Wen Sa?" asked Cyrus.

"Ssh," counseled Mrs. Pollifax, and solemnly quoting Bonchoo, "not a name to be spoken loudly here."

"Then who's Red Shirt?" asked Cyrus patiently.

The officer was dismounting, the dust settling around him, his men surrounding him and one of the soldiers tethering the horse to a post. "Well," began Mrs. Pollifax, seeing that attention was still focused on the two new arrivals, "that young man in the red shirt has tried twice to kill Bonchoo, once on the road to Chiang Rai and once in the jungle, except the poisoned arrow he aimed at him in the jungle hit Mr. Mornajay instead—a man who joined us at the Akha village—which is how we spent our second night in a lost monastery with a holy man."

Cyrus gave her an appreciative glance. "Emily, you've been busy as hell," he said. "If we ever get out of this—"

Red Shirt had suddenly seen the three of them seated on the bench and even from a distance Mrs. Pollifax could see his eyes narrow in anger. He spoke to the officer, who looked at him questioningly, and Red Shirt pointed. Now the officer stared at them, too. He was small and trim,

bareheaded but otherwise perfectly uniformed in khaki tunic and pants, a highly polished leather belt, leather boots and a gun in a leather holster. He wore a thin mustache across his upper lip and dark glasses over his eyes, which dismayed Mrs. Pollifax because she depended upon eyes: she spoke to a person's eyes, she estimated reactions by their eyes, and character by their expression. Beside her she could feel Bonchoo stiffen.

"Like a lion," she reminded him in a whisper.

Having examined Cyrus, Mrs. Pollifax and Bonchoo, the officer strode toward them and came to a stop in front of Bonchoo. "So you remain alive," he said in impeccable clipped English. "You appear to live a charmed life, orders were given—"

"You speak English, thank heaven," broke in Mrs. Pollifax.

"Orders were given," he continued curtly, "that you be executed for informing on us."

"But I'm not an informer!" cried Bonchoo. "You think I walk miles to come here if I am guilty? I wasn't kidnapped and brought here like *Koon* Emily's *sahmee*—" He pointed at Cyrus. "I came here to tell you I am *not* an informer."

Brows lifted skeptically over the dark glasses. Turning to Cyrus, he asked, "And who are you?"

"American citizen kidnapped in Chiang Mai," he snapped, "and who are you, damn it?"

"Please—no offensive language, my ears are very delicate. I am Colonel Lu of the Shan Liberation Army." He bowed slightly and turned back to Bonchoo. "You were saying?"

"I am saying Jacoby must have told lies of me, it has to have been Jacoby who tells you such lies!"

"You deny you were selling information about our camps and supply lines?"

"I do," Bonchoo said with dignity, "and I have walked all these mountains to say this. I do not deny information but the information was *political*, it is about a coup—there is to be a coup in my country, it was about that, *only* that!"

The Colonel's brows had lifted again. "About *what*?"

"A coup—the government in Bangkok to be overthrown, and if Jacoby told you different he lies. Colonel, I have a wife and five children, how can I live in peace if your men keep trying to kill me? I ask you "

The Colonel brushed this aside impatiently. "You can prove this?"

Bonchoo pointed to Cyrus. "I think *he* has the information I try to sell to Americans."

Cyrus looked startled and then uneasy. He said, "I really don't think—I'm sorry to say that I've not the slightest idea what he's talking about."

"Well?" said the Colonel.

Desperately Bonchoo said, "I would ask him to empty his pockets, please!"

"Very well, empty your pockets," the Colonel told Cyrus.

Cyrus began emptying his pockets. From the one he brought out coins and a roll of Thai money, and from the other he brought out a used roll of film, a pencil, a pen and a wide lacquer-and-yarn bracelet.

"There," cried Bonchoo, "the *phyot* arm-ring, see? That's it, that's it!"

"That?" said the Colonel skeptically.

"Let me show you!" Bonchoo seized the arm-ring, his hand moving toward his pocket; abruptly he stopped. "If I may borrow a knife?"

Mrs. Pollifax breathed a sigh of relief; he had come very close to drawing out his Shan murder knife, which would have been tactless, to say the least. The Colonel spoke to his men, rifles were lifted, a knife produced and then rifles lowered to again point at the three of them.

Gripping the knife, Bonchoo cut away the woven yarn, exposing and then unfolding the rolled-up tube of paper. Cyrus stared at it in astonishment. "Good God, *that's* what they were after? Thought it one of Emily's souvenirs!"

Bonchoo held out the letter. "It's written in Vietnamese, Colonel, written by a Thai general named Lueng, and just as I tell you, it is about a coup."

"I will see for myself, I know some Vietnamese," the Colonel said coldly. He removed his dark glasses, tucked them into a pocket of his tunic and brought out a pair of reading glasses. Scanning the letter, he said, "But this is about a coup!"

"Yes yes," Bonchoo said eagerly.

The Colonel, reading it more carefully, smiled. "And with such tact — and yes, a charming touch of acid the officer in Laos refuses to help this Lueng with his coup. Oh, very good! He ends with, 'Revolution will come by itself when the workers and the peasants demand to be heard.' " He looked up from the letter to say crisply, "The coup began yesterday morning in Bangkok."

"Already?"

"Yes. This is dangerous information but it is late, very late." He handed it back to Bonchoo. "It is amusing to see but it is of no interest to us, we are Shan fighting for our liberation from the Burmans." He shrugged. "It may, however, be of interest to the Americans—take it back."

Bonchoo said, "What I would most like to take back is my name as honest teak smuggler."

"Take that, too," the Colonel said, and turned to speak to Red Shirt.

With a nod to Bonchoo he said, "I have told Phibul here that all orders for you to be killed are now canceled and that Jacoby made a very grave mistake."

Bonchoo made a *wai*. "I am most grateful."

"And now can we go, please?" asked Mrs. Pollifax eagerly.

His gaze rested on her thoughtfully. "You have certainly come a long way. One wonders how you found us."

"Yes."

"And certainly it is an inconvenience to have you here."

Cyrus said calmly, "Then we'll be delighted to relieve you of our presence, and since you've already established Mr. Bonchoo's innocence and assured him—"

The Colonel interrupted. "I see that you don't perfectly understand. For myself, I toy with the attractions of letting you go, since we break camp this afternoon and will no longer be in this area should you carelessly speak of us being here. However, this is impossible."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"Because we expect a helicopter shortly with a very high-level person to join us who might not look so kindly on such an act of benevolence. I have met this man, he is not a Buddhist and I might add that he lacks a playful attitude. It will be up to him to decide."

"Decide what?" asked Cyrus.

He shrugged. "Whether you will be free to go. My own interest is in fighting a war but his interests are different, very different."

"And what if he says not?" demanded Cyrus.

He looked surprised. "Why, then, you would be killed and buried here, of course."

"Killed!" cried Mrs. Pollifax. "But what have we done?"

"It's not what you've done, it's what you've seen," he said stiffly, and walked away.

"But what have we seen?" she cried after him in protest.

Watching him go, Bonchoo said bitterly, "To me he gives with one hand and takes away with the other. Of what use to clear my name if instead of the *naklengs* killing me somebody else does?"

"But what have we seen?" repeated Mrs. Pollifax. "How can he speak of killing like that?"

"Steady, m'dear," Cyrus said, reaching for her hand and holding it. "It's probably what I've seen and you've not had time to notice. Behind us, in that long open shed."

She turned her head to see that under the shed's thatch roof stood row upon row of cloth sacks, perhaps a hundred of them, neatly packaged like bags of flour. "Oh," she faltered. "Opium?"

"Don't look," Bonchoo pleaded after he, too, had looked.

"*Is* it opium?" she demanded of him.

He sighed. "It would be morphine, *Koon* Emily, there must be their refinery very near, maybe over that hill. In the refinery they cook opium down into morphine and dry it in the sun, which makes it very small and light to carry. Those bags must be waiting for pack animals to carry them down from the mountains."

She said indignantly, "Well, their morphine would surely be long since gone by the time we reached Chiang Mai!" She glared at the young man who was guarding them. "If we're going to be killed for *that*—"

"Could be other reasons," Cyrus suggested. "Know what you're thinking, m'dear, but I've not a single match with me, have you?" When she only shook her head he said quietly, "It's your great talent for optimism that we need very much just now."

"Optimism," she repeated and was silent, wondering where it had gone. She was very tired, of course, but she realized that after hearing Colonel Lu's announcement she felt utterly drained of optimism and rather frightened. It was true that she had pursued Cyrus with a great deal of optimism and with a one-track mind as well, but she had not looked beyond the joy of finding him. Cyrus had taken a much shrewder measure of their situation than she: he had seen how cheap human life could be in this world of smugglers, warlords and drug merchants, where even their being American was a strike against them. She supposed that she had entertained too many assumptions and expectations: she had assumed that they could leave, and then she had learned that it was not to be that simple, that a stranger would arrive in a helicopter to decide their fate, and this was a shock to her expectations.

She did not speak; they were each of them silent, absorbed by the unpleasant news that they might not survive this day. Several feet away from her their guard watched them closely and with obvious curiosity: she noticed that each small movement, each gesture was observed and cataloged as if he'd never seen Americans before, but his eyes held no hostility. She felt that under other circumstances he would want to ask many questions of them: whether Americans knew about the Shan people, whether all Americans wore shoes of leather, as Cyrus did—his gaze went to them frequently and what had brought them here, but his rifle remained steadily pointed at them and his eyes alert; he was young and he was conscientious and she had no doubt that he would shoot them if they made any reckless moves. Beyond him three of the soldiers had begun dismantling the hut in which she'd found Cyrus. Prefabricated housing had come early to the jungle, she thought, watching them detach each wall of woven bamboo from its post and roll it up like a car-

pet. Under a tree the Colonel had set up a radio and was speaking into it, with glances at the sky and an air of expectation. To the right of him a soldier squatted on the ground with an opened metal box. She watched him place a leaf in the palm of his hand and delicately extract powders from his box which he mixed on the leaf; when this had been done he placed the leaf in his mouth and began to chew slowly, methodically and with much pleasure, occasionally spitting a stream of red to the earth.

She said at last, "Who do you suppose this person is that we're waiting for, this man who decides whether we live or or ."

"Or die," Cyrus said gently. "Say it, m'dear, get the word out."

"All right—die," she said, naming it.

His hand tightened in hers. "We've had a good run for it, you know, a damn good one, Emily."

She admitted this. "Except that to find you alive, Cyrus, has raised the most abominable expectations of our having a few more years together . . . for two days now I've wondered how I ever enjoyed life without you."

He smiled. "Then it's not so bad if we die together, is it?"

She smiled back at him. "Thank you for that, I think it's a lovely attitude."

"Afraid of death?"

She shook her head. "It's hovered very close a number of times, you know. No, I'm not afraid but I admit to some -well, adjustment that it could happen today –so abruptly—in the next hour or so. I did hope to see our house again, and the garden, and another spring, and oh, I *must* be tired, Cyrus, I'm sorry!"

"Can't think why you'd be tired," he said with a smile and held her close, comforting the disappointed child in her until she remembered Bonchoo and drew away, smiled at Cyrus gratefully and turned to Bonchoo.

He was carefully not watching them. "Bonchoo?" she said.

"No, I am not afraid either, *Koon* Emily," he said with dignity. "A Buddhist accepts, and I will die today or not die today, and if I do—well, that is my karma. My regret is that I killed the Shan and drank rice wine with the Akhas, for wine is forbidden to a good Buddhist. In my next life this will be much against me."

"Nonsense," Cyrus said indignantly, "I'll intervene for you, I'll make very clear that any merit you lost has been bloody well gained back by now."

"You think so?" He thought about this. "But I feel much out of reach of the *phi*-spirit who protects me in my village; I have walked too far."

Sadly he shook his head. "My wish now is that I had asked the holy man this morning to bless an amulet for me."

"You mentioned a holy man," Cyrus said. "Having never met a holy man, what's he like?"

Mrs. Pollifax remained silent. It was Bonchoo who described him as a man who had awakened to his Buddha-nature, and without ego lived in a forgotten temple in the jungle, gathering wisdom through meditation.

"And did you think him a holy man, too?" Cyrus asked her.

Mrs. Pollifax hesitated, unsure of herself, wanting to speak of the inscription in his book that puzzled her, but telling herself there was no proof of her bizarre suspicions, and that to speak of them in front of Bonchoo would be unkind to the Acharya. She said slowly, "He refused us help at first, which made me very angry at the time, but for reasons that I think I understand now. Yes, there was something about him, something quite—quite rare," she said, aware of her ineptness.

Bonchoo nodded. "An amulet from him would have protected us," he said, and with a glance at her wristwatch he added wistfully, "It is four o'clock? My children would be coming home from school now in my village, and my mother-in-law would be waking from her nap, and my wife back from the market." He sighed and then went on, his voice becoming more cheerful. "Because she is very smart, my wife, she would have received good money for the eggs she sold. And in a few hours, by seven o'clock, there would be a good dinner. You have not had proper Thai dinner," he told Mrs. Pollifax firmly. "We would give you *Tom-yum*—good hot soup—and *Gaeng ped*, which is curry with coconut milk, and *Khai palo* or *Horn-muk*—steamed fish—and melons very sweet and juicy."

"You're making my mouth water," Cyrus told him. "What are the names of your children?"

"You wish to know?" he said, pleased. "I have five. The two girl-children are Amporn and Panngham, the three boys are Praphas, Charoon and Pote."

"And your wife?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"She is called Mi-mi."

Beside her Cyrus suddenly stiffened. "Listen—do you hear it, too?"

"The helicopter?" asked Mrs. Pollifax, and learned all over again that the cessation of waiting could be as traumatic as the waiting itself. The soldiers had also heard it and were gathering next to the Colonel under his tree, their guard with them, so that Mrs. Pollifax, pointing to him, said, "Do you think we could make a run for it now?"

This drew a smile from Bonchoo. "They too can run, *Koon* Emily, and they have guns."

"Sensible man," said Cyrus. "Ah—there it is!"

The helicopter hovered, looking a mere toy in the great blue sky, an impertinent eagle waiting to pounce. It remained poised above the compound and then began its vertical descent, the tops of trees bending under the assault of its backwash, its roto-blades sending up clouds of dust as it touched the ground. The door was lifted away, a man tossed two duffel bags to the turf and then eased himself to the earth. Picking up the duffel bags, he ducked to one side, and once he was clear the helicopter lifted and zig-zagged off to the east.

Mrs. Pollifax gasped, "Cyrus he looks American!"

Bonchoo said, "Certainly he is not Thai or Chinese English?"

"I wonder: good or bad," murmured Cyrus.

"But American—*here*?" she said.

Colonel Lu did not go forward to meet the man but waited for him beside the tree. The man strode toward him, lean and confident and looking as if he'd just been snatched from the streets of Bangkok in his white shirt and tie, well-cut jacket and chino slacks. As he drew closer and Mrs. Pollifax could see his face she was surprised by his attractiveness: it was not a strong face but it was certainly a handsome one, boyish in spite of the curly black hair threaded with gray, and definitely he looked American. There was a rakish quality about him and she saw lines of dissipation in his face, but his deep tan enhanced the pale blue eyes and were a distraction from the mouth and chin, which were weak. She thought he looked like a man who would be long on charm and that he would want and need to test that charm frequently on women.

And this was the man who was to decide their fate; she did not feel hopeful, not with that mouth and chin.

Colonel Lu bowed, making a formal *wai*. "Mr. Chollee, is it not?" he said. "Welcome, it has been many years since we met."

The man stopped, his eyes narrowing as he saw the three of them seated on the bench. "Who are those people?" he demanded. "Where did they come from, what the hell are they doing here?"

"It has been a private matter," the Colonel said courteously.

"Nothing's private here, who are they? What I don't need are a pair of tourists and a Thai, damn it, what are they doing here, how did they find the camp?" His voice was almost petulant, high-pitched and urgent.

Cyrus called out to him angrily, "Didn't *find* the camp, I was kidnapped and brought here no choice at all and this is my wife and this is a friend and who the devil are *you*?"

"You see?" said Mr. Chollee to the Colonel. "Americans are like this curious and demanding. *And they have seen me*."

"Yes, they have seen you."

"We let them go and they talk, which doesn't fit into my plans at all."

Colonel Lu shrugged. "It's entirely in your hands, of course."

"Then kill them," the man said dismissingly. "Kill them now."

"Oh," gasped Mrs. Pollifax.

"Look here," began Cyrus.

"Shut up," Chollee told him. "Kill them, Lu."

The Colonel shook his head. "This I will not do, Mr. Chollee. I fight a war, and to kill in war is one matter. We Shan did not hesitate to kill the Japanese in World War Two when they overran our country, but to kill without reason is to lose great merit. It is due to a mistake of my men that they are here at all. This I will have nothing to do with."

"You Buddhists," Chollee said irritably. "All right, I'll kill them myself but I hope you're not too squeamish to get your men digging some graves."

"They will dig three graves for you," the Colonel said stiffly, "but not kill for you. If Americans wish to kill Americans it is not my business." He walked away and his men followed, looking back with curious glances.

"Oh, how dare you," whispered Mrs. Pollifax.

He laughed. "Easily! Stand up, now. Line up in a row."

So it's really going to happen like an execution, she thought, *a hasty one at that*, and she reached for Cyrus's hand. A certain calm surprised and dignified her as she took her place between Bonchoo and Cyrus. The Colonel had withdrawn but she could hear the sound of shovels digging and the soft thud of earth as graves began to be hollowed out of the ground. The sun shone on palms and bamboo and a faint breeze sent dust motes dancing. She held Cyrus's hand, trembling only a little.

In the forest a bird cried out shrilly.

She heard the click of his safety catch released.

He lifted his revolver and aimed it.

In one second now, she thought . . . *in just one second* . . . She closed her eyes.

"Drop it, Charlie!" shouted a voice from the trees behind them. "Drop your gun, I've got you covered!"

She opened her eyes. She caught a glimpse of Charlie's face, saw it register shock and incredulity, and then she turned with Cyrus and Bonchoo to see the man who came limping into the compound.

It was Mornajay, deathly pale but upright, his revolver leveled at their executioner.

CHAPTER 17

"*You*!" CRIED CHARLIE, HIS FACE TURNED INTO A MASK OF HATE and fury. "How did you know, how did you get here, damn it, how—was it Jacoby?"

Mornajay said scornfully, "That friend of yours you hooked on opium? No, it wasn't Jacoby."

"Then who—"

"Chin-Ling," he said.

Charlie's eyes blazed. "You're lying, I don't believe you, she'd never—"

"You broke too many promises to her," Mornajay said evenly. "She told me you're on the run, she gave me longitude, latitude and date, Charlie. I've come to take you back."

"Back!" Charlie laughed. "On one of your bloody rescue missions again? Well, my answer to that is damn you and damn you again."

"Yes, you've certainly tried hard enough to do that," said Mornajay. "Drop your gun, Charlie, or I'll shoot it out of your hand."

"You wouldn't dare," he sneered. "Look at you; if I threw a pebble at you you'd fall over."

"Don't try me, Charlie."

"Thank God where I'm going you'll never find me again!"

"You're not going anywhere, Charlie."

"Look out!" cried Cyrus as Charlie's hand moved.

Two guns fired simultaneously, the sound of them reverberating among the hills and returning to them before the echo died away. Dust rose from the impact of a body hitting the ground. In the jungle a mynah bird scolded noisily and subsided. The trees themselves seemed to sigh; the silence after the moment of violence was almost voluptuously complete and silken.

Mornajay stood dazed, staring at the fallen Charlie. He whispered, "Oh my God," and swayed on his feet.

"There's blood on your sleeve," Mrs. Pollifax told him, and she went to him.

"Only grazed me," he said impatiently, and noticing her for the first time, "Mrs. Pollifax again, isn't it? Need a bit of help," he said with a twisted smile. "There's a backpack behind the tree over there—over where the stretcher is." He pointed. "Somebody get it."

"You persuaded the monks to bring you!"

"Only way—that or crawl," he said with that same unreal grimace of a smile. His gaze went to the man sprawled on the ground and she saw tears in his eyes. "Help me over to him, will you?"

Bonchoo said quickly, "I'll get the backpack."

Leaning on Mrs. Pollifax, Mornajay walked unsteadily to the dead man and stood looking down at him. "Never could shoot straight," he said sadly, and sank to his knees beside him.

"You know him," said Mrs. Pollifax, speaking the obvious.

Mornajay reached out a trembling hand and tenderly closed the wide-open staring dead eyes. He said bitterly, "He died still hating, still trying to destroy me." His voice broke. "He's right, you know, I should have stopped rescuing him long ago. The forged checks, stolen money, promises broken, people hurt, but to learn " He drew a long, shuddering sigh. "To learn—find out—be told *this* is what he'd come to!"

"Who is he?" she asked.

"My brother," he said in a broken voice. "My family."

She looked away, moved by the longing she heard behind that word *family*, the cry of a lonely man struggling to be loved. She tried to remember the imperious Mornajay of the Akha village, and she discovered that she wanted him back. She could only wait silently and as unobtrusively as possible while he struggled for control; she wasn't sure that any of them existed for him at this moment.

He said at last, turning away, "I'll take him back with me. I can't leave him here . . . a grave so far from everything he knows—knew " He shook his head. "It seems there's nothing left for me to rescue now except the name of Mornajay . . ."

"I suppose that's important," she said, helping him to his feet.

He gave her a glance so sharp that she saw the other man behind the grief, the man accustomed to authority, privacy, success: the Mornajay she'd met earlier was surfacing at last, and she was relieved.

"In some circles," he said dryly, "it is a name that's known for its integrity."

"Bonchoo's brought your backpack," she pointed out.

He nodded. "The Shans, they've gone?"

Bonchoo shook his head. "They're up on the hill watching."

"Then help me to that rock," said Mornajay sharply. "There's not much time, we've got to work fast. There's a radio in the backpack—you," he said to Cyrus. "You must be the husband. You look intelligent—"

"Moderately, yes," said Cyrus with a twinkle in his eye.

"Set up the radio for me, will you? I've not much strength, damn it. And you—Bonchoo, isn't it? In the backpack you'll find a small tin of lighter fluid, matches and a newspaper."

I missed seeing THOSE, thought Mrs. Pollifax.

"Crumple the newspapers, soak them in the fluid and shove them into those bags of morphine for burning."

"Wonderful—I'll help," said Mrs. Pollifax, and feeling amused now by his return to Mornajay-normalcy, she said, "Are you going to give us time soon to thank you for saving our lives?"

"No need to be maudlin. Anyway," he added with an embarrassed smile, "I seem to recall that you contributed to mine." He sank down on the rock and mopped his forehead. He looked ghastly; she wanted to ask him a dozen questions, wanted to ask how on earth he hoped to take back his brother's body when he could scarcely walk himself, she wanted to ask who he was, and how he'd persuaded the novices to bring him here, and who Chin-Ling was, and how he happened to know the name of Jacoby, and what he hoped for from the radio.

Instead, silently, she helped Bonchoo open the tin of lighting fluid, find the matches and crumple the paper while Cyrus lifted the radio out of Mornajay's backpack and handed it up to him on the rock. Crackling sounds ensued, Mornajay reset dials and adjusted volume.

When he spoke he surprised her. "Callahan?" he called crisply. "This is M, are you hearing me?"

So he'd not come alone . . . She exchanged glances with Bonchoo and they stopped working to frankly listen. After a cloud of static a voice answered. "Receiving you, M, you okay?"

"One casualty—X is dead." His voice faltered and then steadied. "Camp's about five miles farther south than anticipated. How soon can you be here?"

"Trouble?"

"Could be."

"Ten minutes. Can you give precise bearings?"

Mornajay smiled faintly. "No need, there's going to be one hell of a bonfire here shortly that will guide you in, Callahan. Look for the smoke."

"Reading you, M . . . you okay?"

"A-okay," said Mornajay grimly, and handing the radio back to Cyrus, he returned the gun to his lap.

"Drug Enforcement Agency?" asked Cyrus with a lift of his eyebrows.

"I don't think introductions are necessary," Mornajay said with his usual curtness. "I don't know who you are and I don't want to, although how a couple of tourists got here is beyond me, and who I am doesn't matter in the slightest."

"Is it a plane coming?" asked Mrs. Pollifax, wanting to be sure.

"Helicopter. Sorry, there'll be no room for you," he said gruffly, "which is why I suggest that as soon as you light that fire you get the hell out of here, and for heaven's sake stay hidden while you light it. The only thing I can do for you is make certain you're not implicated in the burning of this stuff—that fire is going to cost somebody close to a million dollars. If Wen Sa is on the hill watching—"

"Wen Sa?" gasped Bonchoo.

Mornajay said dryly, "He may have called himself something else but the man I saw here in uniform earlier answers to all the descriptions known of Wen Sa."

Bonchoo shivered. "Yai—I have met Wen Sa?"

"Leave now. You've time to reach Tha Ton before dark, Prasert told me you'd been shown the trail."

Bonchoo nodded.

"What about you?" asked Cyrus. "I counted eight Shans and you can't hold them even for ten minutes if they rush you."

"No?" Again Mornajay smiled that twisted smile. "My gun will hold them off—there's Charlie's gun, too—and Callahan is on his way." He checked his watch.

"Eight against one," Cyrus said doubtfully. "I think we ought to stay until Callahan arrives."

Mornajay laughed. "Light the fire, will you? What could you do without guns except get in the way? If I die, I die . . . the one thing I can't do, damn it, is hobble over there and light that fire."

"We're doing it now," called Mrs. Pollifax, with a nod to Bonchoo, and he struck the first match.

"Good—and then for God's sake leave before they see any smoke. Move it!"

Mrs. Pollifax lit the last match, saw it ignite the last sheet of crumpled paper and reached for her purse.

"Emily? Bonchoo?" said Cyrus, waiting.

"For this I do not need to be begged," said Bonchoo, and he ran with

Mrs. Pollifax to join Cyrus, who turned and led them up the hill at a brisk pace.

When they reached the crest they stopped for a second to catch their breath and look back. Mornajay made a lonely figure seated in the center of the compound, the gun in his hand, the backpack on his lap. Beyond him smoke drifted lazily up from the pile of dried opium, scarcely discernible as yet, and then a tongue of flame ran up one side, and then another . . .

Bonchoo said, "A strange man—a little mad, I think, and *very* rude, but—we did not die today, *Koon* Emily—and we return with your *sahmee* after all!"

CHAPTER 18

SOME EIGHTEEN HOURS LATER, ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON, CYRUS, Mrs. Pollifax and Bonchoo limped into the airport at Chiang Rai, jaded, considerably disheveled and near to exhaustion. It had been Bonchoo who guided them to the village of Tha Ton, Bonchoo who found them food and a place to sleep for the night and Bonchoo who bargained with the owner of a long-tailed boat with a stripped-down V-8 engine, which earned them—as if there had not been enough excitement, thought Mrs. Pollifax—a six-hour race downriver the next morning through rapids, past ominous boulders, through a narrow gorge and finally to Chiang Rai.

It was also Bonchoo who insisted on escorting them to the airport for the plane to Bongkok.

"But you'll miss your bus home to Chiang Saen," she protested again, when Cyrus went off to buy their tickets.

He said gravely, "I do this because I would much better like to invite you to my village to rest, but I do not think it so restful there, so like first-class guide I escort you."

Cyrus, joining them again, grinned. "Not restful because of Charoon, Praphas, Pote, Amporn and Panngham?"

"You have good memory," Bonchoo said, smiling up at him. "They would be all excitement to meet you, yes, but it is not like hotel, and you are both—"

"Older peoples?" suggested Cyrus with a twinkle.

"Very *tired* peoples," Bonchoo said with a reproachful glance.

"How about a raincheck?" asked Mrs. Pollifax.

"Raincheck?" he said, puzzled.

"She means we could visit you later, after we've convalesced," said Cyrus. "Before we leave your country for home. What about it, Emily?"

"Oh, I'd love that," she said warmly. "To see you again to meet your family—"

Bonchoo's eyes brightened. "Then it is not goodbye after all, *Koon* Emily!"

"*Not* goodbye, no. Oh, and Bonchoo—" With a smile at Cyrus she reached into her purse and brought out the Buddhist votive. "Ruamsak may be dead," she told him gravely, "but he delivered all the information before he was er murdered with a Shan knife, and so this was to be given to you to Ruamsak—for services rendered."

He accepted it graciously. "A very pretty votive I thank you."

"Not votive," said Cyrus. "Tell him, m'dear."

"Like your *phyot* arm-band it's in disguise," she told him eagerly. "It's a cube of gold."

"*Gold*?" he gasped. "*G-gold?*" he stammered, his eyes shining. "Yai! my wife can have a sewing machine at last, and I—maybe now I open a shop in Chiang Saen and not smuggle teak anymore!" He beamed at them happily. "It is a world of wonders, is it not? filled with *phi*-spirits and ghosts and *nagas* that have surrounded us all, and who would have thought we would live through it to see the Chiang Rai airport! You have good spirits looking after you!"

"Think so?" Cyrus said, amused.

"Oh yes, and we are most fortunate of peoples, for we have survived Wen Sa!"

She said teasingly, "A tale to be told in your village?"

"With many additions," he assured her gravely. "A *farang* of giant size carrying tins of sardines, rescued from the evil ones by a woman magician who is surely a spirit herself—"

"That's how the story will go?"

"Of course," he said, grinning.

She smiled back at him, suddenly recalling her first impressions and her doubts of him, and remembering how patient he had been with her, and how loyal. Certain vignettes tugged at her memory: of Bonchoo merrily smoking a cheroot in the Akha village; of Apha's joy at being given a tube of lipstick, a mirror, a cluster of safety pins; of an outraged American who had been mistaken for Cyrus. She thought of Colonel Lu, and of Mornajay's strange pilgrimage, but most of all she remembered a temple in the jungle with three dreaming Buddhas and a holy man.

"It's goodbye then for only a little while," she said, and to her surprise she was hugged by Bonchoo.

"Yes—you come soon, but first to Bangkok."

"To sleep," she said, nodding.

"For at least two days," Cyrus added with a grin and they headed out to the plane waiting on the tarmac.

But Mrs. Pollifax had no intention of sleeping late the next day, there was still something important to be done, and the next morning, once again at the Oriental Hotel, she was awake by seven. She lay quietly for a moment, savoring the miracle of Cyrus asleep beside her, and turned her head to be sure—yes, he was still there, he was real and then she carefully slid out of bed to avoid waking him. From the window she could look down on the river. Somewhere below lay the terrace, and as she dressed she remembered the day an eternity ago when she had pictured them back here in a matter of hours to once again watch the barges and pleasure boats passing on the river. And now they were here, five days late and considerably wiser, but they were here.

How strange life can be, she thought, and lifting the guidebook from Cyrus's suitcase, she sat down, opened it, ran her fingers down the index and turned to a certain page. She had a choice, she noted, but she copied out only one of the addresses, the one most accessible at this hour of the day. Scrawling a note for Cyrus—BACK SOON—she propped it on the bureau and tiptoed out of the room.

Descending in the elevator, she did not turn to the right and head for the terrace but proceeded through the glass doors to the taxi stand. The elegantly uniformed concierge summoned a cab for her, she gave the address 95 Wireless Road—and asked that the driver be instructed to wait for her there.

It was not a long drive. Once at her destination she stepped out of the cab to enter the gardens and grounds of the U.S. Embassy and to be met at once by the fragrance of flowers and of freshly cut grass. She paused briefly to admire jasmine and bougainvillea, but already she had caught a glimpse of what she had come to see and now she moved impatiently toward it.

It was a bronze statue, prominently displayed near the path and encircled by a bed of bright flowers. As she drew close it seemed to tower over her –as three Buddhas had once towered over her, she remembered. Reaching it, she politely read the plaque that identified the figure as John Lloyd Matthews and then she looked up into the face. But bronze was very different from flesh, she thought, and she stood under it for several minutes, frowning and in doubt, for the sculptor had posed the man gazing off into the horizon and he looked bloodless and official. The features vaguely matched but she reflected dryly that the head of the man in bronze was not shaven. Still in doubt she stepped around a rose bush and moved to the side. Reaching the profile, she gasped. At

once—with a jarring abruptness she was swept back in time to the parapet of a crumbling temple in the mountains where she had last seen this profile etched against a moonlit sky, calm and serene in deep meditation.

There was no longer any doubt: she was staring at the Acharya.

How very strange, she thought, and yet . . . and yet . . . how very right, somehow.

Dimly she became aware that a man had stopped beside her to look at both her and the statue. He spoke now, and she turned to look at him: a young man carrying a briefcase, obviously headed for the Embassy. Gazing at the statue, he said, "He was a great man, you know name of John Lloyd Matthews."

"Yes," she said. "Did you know him?"

He shook his head. "I was assigned here too late to know him, unfortunately, but I saw him –just once—a few days before he left for Chiang Mai and disappeared." He shivered. "If he was murdered I hope he died quickly."

Mrs. Pollifax thought about this and smiled. "To the things of the world I'm sure that he died quickly –very quickly."

"A pity what happened to him," he went on, scarcely heeding her oblique words. "It seems such a waste, he changed so many things in Thailand for the better, you know."

"Perhaps Thailand changed many things in him, too," she said softly. "For the better," she added with a smile, and with a polite nod she returned to her waiting taxi to go back and tell Cyrus of her discovery: that among the people to whom they owed their lives there could now be added the name of his old friend Joker Matthews.

On Wednesday morning Carstairs said to Bishop, "By the way, Mornajay's back in his office this morning."

Bishop's jaw dropped. "What, no scandal, no investigation, no early retirement? I must say that's mysterious!"

"Well, this *is* the CIA," Carstairs pointed out. "Home of mysteries, digressions, covert and overt coverups, et cetera et cetera et cetera. I hear that he looks ghastly, he's apparently been quite ill."

"Aren't you curious?" asked Bishop.

Carstairs smiled, picked up his cup of coffee and leaned back in his chair. "Bishop," he said, "I am very curious. I would like *very* much to know what Mornajay was up to, and where he's been and why he killed Jacoby—which I'm certain he did . . . I would also like very much to know why Mrs. Pollifax was so deliberately evasive in her phone call to us as to where the hell she and Cyrus had been for five days. But since

they're off viewing temples now, and inaccessible, and since Mornajay has been restored to us, one must be philosophic . . . What's important is that the coup failed in Bangkok, Mrs. Pollifax and Cyrus are safe and the evidence against Lueng on its way to us, Mornajay is back at his desk and we are all of us—thank God—in our appointed places again."

"Amen," said Bishop with feeling. "I take it we can now dispense with our Thailand-watching, after its occupying us for one hell of a long week?"

"Consider it back in the hands of the DEA now," said Carstairs cheerfully. "Who incidentally reported a raid in northern Thailand last weekend, and nine hundred pounds of dried opium burned to an ash."

Bishop chuckled. "Maybe that's where Mrs. Pollifax was—maybe Emily lit the fire."

Carstairs gave him a pitying glance. "Your imagination certainly knows no limits, Bishop. Curb it and get back to those reports on the Sudan, will you?"

"Yes, sir," Bishop said and retreated to his office to begin another day's work.

(continued from front flap)

adventure. Now they're asking her to leave immediately on a mission halfway across the world. What can Mrs. Pollifax say but yes?

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